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“Leaning against the fence, with the milk-pail  
in her hand.”—Page 17.

A  
BUNDLE  
—OF—  
FAGOTS

BY  
LAVINIA HARTWELL EGAN



FRANKLIN OHIO  
THE EDITOR PUBLISHING CO  
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*This Lavinia Egan  
Jan 23, 1936*





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## PREFACE

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The stories contained in this volume comprise gleanings from the six years of my more or less intermittent work as a writer. Not a few of them were done when I was a student at Ward Seminary, Nashville, Tennessee, and served only as fagots to keep the pot boiling while I pursued the study of drawing and painting. In the course of time, the boiling of the pot became the absorbing question, and drawing and painting had to give place to the steady work of fagot-gathering.

The way that I have trod in pursuit of this work has been a very pleasant one, and the kindly hand that has guided mine throughout is that of Mr. D. G. FENNO, Managing Editor of the *Philadelphia Times*. In the old studio days when life was young and hope was new, there was a dear friend whose easel sat beside my own, and together we planned our lives. But Another planned, and the lines diverged to meet again when Miss LOUISE LEWIS made the illustrations which add so much to the interest of these pages.

If I write other and better books by and by, will the friends who read this remember that I hoped to do so?

Very truly,

LAVINIA HARTWELL EGAN.

Shreveport, Louisiana,  
Dec. 4, 1895.

*To my Mother and Father*  
*This, the first fruits of my pen, is*  
*Affectionately dedicated.*

Lavinia Hartwell Egan.

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# THE LEGEND OF THE RIFT.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE changeful mid-August air blew nippingly through the chinks of Bill Teague's log cabin, perched high up on a long western spur of the Cumberland ridge in East Tennessee, and within the cavernous chimney-depths beyond the wide hearth, the fire-light blazed and flared, sending out narrow rays that crept into every corner of the little room, and threw quaint shadows straggling up among the smoky rafters. Its warm glow touched the wide-ruffled white cap of Granny McDermot, dozing and nodding in her low chair in the corner; it shone upon the clicking knitting-needles in Penny Shackelford's nimble, bony fingers, and upon the rasping cards in Mrs. Teague's lazy, fat ones, and glinted upon the loose brown curls that broke about Licia's brow as she trod softly back and forth before the spinning-wheel.

Licia Teague was a tall, slim, blue-eyed young thing, with smooth, fair skin, and a glow of color in

her high cheeks, and now and then as the wide wheel whirred busily she added the music of her voice in a sweet, crooning contralto.

But the crooning and the whirring and the knitting and the carding suddenly ceased. With a scream that sent the empty pipe from between her own toothless gums, and the clicking needles from Penny Shackleford's nimble fingers, rattling noisily upon the hearth-stones below, Granny waked from her doze and sprang to her feet, her head trembling, her cap-strings fluttering.

"What ails yer, Granny?" said Licia, going to her and taking her by the hand.

"Don't yer tech me, chile," said the old woman. "A vision is before me."

Her voice was singularly rich, deep and unquavering, her eyes glowed and shone beneath her beetling brows, and her head towered straightly erect above Licia's as she held the girl off with one hand, and, with the other, extended her stout staff as a seer might a divining rod. Penny Shackleford and Mrs. Teague only gazed at the old woman in open-mouthed amazement as she went on fiercely, staring straight before her.

"I hear the stirring of a great wind, and see the burning of a fierce fire! I see death and destruction an' dreary desolation! I see the lappin' of the flame tongues an' the whirlin' of the blindin' smoke! I hear the curses of strong men, an' the wailing of women an' the cryin' of young child'n! Woe ter them that give suck this night, an' ter the mountain woman, who suffers in the perils of childbirth! Woe, woe, woe! For the finger of God is pointed in wrath, and

the flame tongues turn upon the hands that lighted them. Woe, woe, woe!"

The sparkling eyes hid themselves again beneath the wrinkled lids, the cap-strings fluttered and were still; the outstretched staff fell to the floor with a crash, and the old woman herself sank in a heap on the hearth at Licia's feet.

"The old 'un air clean daft," said Penny Shackleford by and by, when the three women had put Granny away for the night in the fat, round bed in the corner. The nimble Penny had resumed her seat in the chimney-jamb, and was trying vainly to pick up the stitches lost on Granny's vision.

Licia only glanced up at her sharply without speaking. The girl had set the wheel back into its corner, and, from Granny's low chair, was watching the fire pictures glow and fade.

"The Lord knows whar Licia's Pa is at this night," said Mrs. Teague, devoutly.

The present Mrs. Teague was the second of the name, and only Licia's step-mother. She usually spoke of her husband as "Licia's Pa," because it seemed to her somehow to keep the proper relationship in evidence, and to save trouble generally, and Mrs. Teague always did cheerfully anything that saved trouble.

"Yes, the Lord only knows whar he is, Sister Liz'-beth," said the nimble Penny. "He ain't been home sence yistiddy mornin'."

"Yer ain't got no call ter say the Lord only knows, Penny Shackleford," said Licia, without lifting her eyes from the fire, "seein's I know 'bout 's well as the Lord do."



"Well, I say, Licia Teague, you air a cool 'un, you air," said the fat Mrs. Teague. "A body would 'low as mebbe you an' the Lord was sorter in cahoot the way you let on, an' you a j'iner, too; you oughter be 'shame ter talk thater way!"

"You air wastin' yer breath, Miss Liz'beth," said the girl, with the patience of utter indifference. "Yer mought need it termorrow, mebbe, when yer'll likely see as the old 'un air none so daft after all."

"The way that gal do let on beats my time," said the nimble Penny, with a sniff of her sharp nose. "Likely you kin tell whether your Pa air dead or 'live, seein' he have been gone so long."

A groan from Mrs. Teague at the dubious suggestion made Licia lean forward and put her hand gently upon her step-mother's stout arm.

"You air overly nimble with yer tongue, Penny Shackleford, but Bill Teague air all right, Miss Liz'beth," she said, reassuringly. "He war ever one ter look out fer hisse'f."

Whatever knowledge or suspicion she may have had, however, concerning her father's whereabouts must not at least have been particularly reassuring, for it was with considerable uneasiness about him that she crept into bed beside Penny in the little back room by and by.

The one small narrow window in the close little room was just beside the girl's head, and when the voice of the sleeping Penny rasped out its slumberous staccato Licia opened the wooden shutter and leaned her head against the broad sill, looking out into the night. Away up the mountain side, toward the Rift, an owl screeched its unwelcome plaint, and,

with a shiver, the girl stole from bed and crept softly through the open door into the next room, feeling with her hands upon the floor in the dark till she found one of Granny's slippers by the bedside, and turned it upside down to break the spell of the ominous bird's warning.

## CHAPTER II.

Even the turning of a slipper could not break the spell that hung over all the mountain. The spirit of the times imbued its tree-crowned fastnesses, and the smouldering fires of discontent, touched by the fuse of oppression, were bursting into flame.

The morning of the thirteenth came but tardily over the eastern hills, as if to defer the evil day. About the little cabins, all along the hillslopes, women-folk went laggingly to their work, their hearts with the men who were making a struggle with destiny, their hopes with the issue of the day's work.

Up the ridge at Tracey City the guards, worn and spent with nights of fruitless watching, moved sleepily to their accustomed duties within the stockade, or followed the restless, sullen convicts to the mines and the coke-ovens. At a small, uncovered table in the long, silent refectory Warden Stone sat eating his solitary breakfast. Through the open doorway he could see, now and then, one of the guards pass, his head bowed and his footsteps lagging; the sunlight, steamy with the recent mist, blazed in the dust of the bare yard and on the glaring, whitewashed barracks. The whole thing oppressed him. Deep down in his

heart he understood and sympathized with the rebellion and discontent which he knew were lurking without the stockade's high wall, but, honest man that he was, he had determined to protect to the utmost the interest of the men he represented. He put the knife and fork across his still unemptied plate and was leaving the table, when a brisk step without startled him.

"You are wanted at the gate, sir," said the guard, in a hoarse, sleepy voice, turning at once to go.

As Stone went down the steps and into the yard a kitten, a pretty little black and white thing, ran out from the kitchen behind and rubbed itself about his feet. Without thinking, perhaps, he stooped and picked the little thing up and carried it in his arms to the gate.

"What do you want?" he asked of the miner, who stood without, waiting for him.

"Ter tell yer that the drivers an' bosses have struck," said the man, sullenly.

Stone stopped and put the kitten down into the dusty road, waiting till he saw it run away over the broken slate dumps toward the town, then he turned, himself, and started to the nearest convict mine. As he came to the entrance of the cave the donkey cart passed out over the tramway, dumping its black load beside the track; within he could hear a muffled sound of singing, and now and then the sharp click of a pick.

"Yer better not go in thar, sir," said the cartman, unhitching his mule.

"Why not?" asked Stone a little sharply, as he wheeled about.

The man only jerked his thumb over his shoulder without speaking, and with less of consternation than of surprise, perhaps, Stone saw a long line of men marching through the stockade gate.

"They air the free miners, sir," said the cartman, "an' they mean mischief, they do."

Stone pushed his soft felt hat down upon his head and ran rapidly up the slope to the stockade.

A group of miners came to the gate to meet him from within.

"We'uns air changed things up some'at in here, sir," said one of them, touching his cap with his left hand; there was a gun in his right. "We'll hafter hol' yer guards fer a while yit, what few yer got here, but we don't mean no harm ter you, ef yer'll jes' be easy. We'uns have stood erbout as much as we air gwineter; that's all, sir. The men air movin' the things out'n the offices thar; whenst they git th'ough we'uns air goin' ter burn the stockade."

"There's no use in doing that, men," began Stone.

"Use ernough," said a big, heavy-browed man, stepping up beside the spokesman. "Mebbe yer know as I'm Bill Teague, sir, an' ef yer do, yer likewise knows I mean what I say. We air free men, we air, an' we aim ter be treated as sech. We air fightin' fur bread an' meat, an' we fight ter win." The men behind murmured their assent, and Teague went on. "Yer kin have yer jail birds by an' by, an' clear out'n here with 'em, but right now yer'll hafter lay low whilst we'uns sen's this here ol' barracks to Kingdom Come."

There was not long to wait. The dry, lime-coated barracks burned like tinder, the flames spread-

ing with their own wind. An escort of the miners had loaded a train with the convicts and their guards, and as Stone stood on the rear platform of the receding coach he saw the little black-and-white stockade kitten come out of the station, rubbing itself against the facing of the door. Away off up the slope the fire blazed and flared, the smoke clouds blotting the sky.

### CHAPTER III.

At Cowan they met an up-going train, a special carrying a company of State troops to the relief of the Tracey City camp.

"You boys are too late," said Stone to the officer in charge.

"Our orders were to go to Tracey," said the Captain, stepping upon the car as the bell rang.

"God help them and bring them through all right," said Stone a little sadly, as he shook himself into his seat and pulled his hat down over his eyes.

"Well, it seems there is nothing left for us to do but to follow the brilliant example of the King of France, and march down the hill again," said the Captain, ruefully, when once they got up the mountain. "I have wired for return orders, and we shall have to wait here till they come."

"In the meantime, I should like leave of absence for a few hours," said a tall young Sergeant, who sat looking out of the window of the car.

"What's the game, Mac?" asked the Captain, with a laugh.

"Nothing," said the young fellow, stretching his

long limbs. "I used to live over there on that lower spur once, and I think I should like to take a look at the old land, that is all. I shall report on time, Captain."

Up the slope the stockade smoked and burned, but the mines were silent and empty; the fires were out in the coke furnaces, and all was quiet in the little dirty town. The young man crossed the dusty road, and, dropping down the mountain side, was soon deep in the underbrush. The afternoon air was hot and stifling and dense from the smoking barracks, but he took off his close-fitting cap and unbuttoned the high collar of his coat.

"I wonder if Licia will know me," he said softly under his breath; "little Licia Teague."

He had stooped to break a frond of sweet fern that shot up in the path, when the cracking of a dry twig startled him, and he turned to find himself looking straight down the barrel of a pistol.

They were desperate looking men enough, the two who stood over him, but he was no coward. "What is it?" he asked, drawing himself up.

"Yes, that's what we 'low, too; what is it?" said one of the men, without moving. "What do you'uns mean by comin' here with them soljer clo'es on in these mountings? We air free men, we air, an' we want no sech trundle-bed trash as you'uns pesterin' 'roun' here."

"Why, Bill Teague," said the young fellow, when the man was done; "don't you know me?"

"Yes, I know yer well enough, Dan'l McAlpine," Teague answered. "I knowed yer mother afore yer; I'd know them eyes er Hester Levan's ef

yer'd drapped out'n heaven with 'em. She gin me the slip oncet, but my turn's come now. We'uns air settin' up many er ol' score on the mountings this day, an' I air glad you happened erlong to git your shur."

"What do you mean, man?" asked Dan, sharply.

"Likely yer'll fin' out," Teague answered. "Yer know the way to the Rift ridge, don't yer?"

"Yes," said Dan.

"Well, strike a trot."

"To the Rift?" asked Dan. "Why, man, that is miles away, and I must report at eight."

"Well, you air a fresh 'un," said Teague, with a grin. "Likely yer'll take yer marchin' orders fum me yit erwhile, though. Give us yer gun an' lead on ter the Rift. Me an' Aaron here'll foller."

How dear and familiar everything seemed to Dan in the little wooded trail up the mountain, and how sweet the air was when the sun had gone, and he passed beyond reach of the smoke fumes! By and by came the glorious afterglow, warming all the misty valley and tipping the treetops with color, till silently out of the darkness shot the moon, playing hide-and-seek among the trees as he passed, and sifting in patches of silver on the path through the underbrush. How beautiful it all was to Dan, who loved it so, and how glad he was for the very joy of living!

#### CHAPTER IV.

The next morning heaven itself seemed to have bent down to touch the earth, or else some Titan's hand held the hills aloft, waving their tree-plumes in



the clouds. The mist was over all, subtle, illusive, entrancing, hiding sights familiar, and holding, perhaps, all that one hoped.

In the midst of it, with its dampness cooling her cheeks and curling the soft tendrils of hair about her brow, stood Licia, leaning against the fence with the milkpail in her hand. But the tinkling of the cow-bell came faintly from the underbrush below, and within the little pen the still unawakened calf slept in satisfied comfort, unready for his morning's meal. The air was sweet with the odor of the morning, and the green leaves bent down, heavy with the moisture they seemed to hold greedily.

Licia watched the little space about her grow gradually more and more as the mists crept slowly backward with the coming of the sun over the hill-tops; yet across the gorge, high up on the Rift ridge, fended by the trees, they still lingered, wrapping fold on fold about the rocks, weaving pictures that grew and faded between the tree-bolls. But, besides the tree-trunks and the sprawling underbrush, what was it that the girl saw up there in the mist? What was it that seemed to make her heart stop beating as she stood there wide-eyed and startled in the early morning light? High up on the ridge, with the veil of cloud enwrapping them, she had seen the faint figures of a man and a woman that seemed to beckon to her with dim spirit hands as together they sank through the mist into the darkness.

"The wraiths o' the Rift," said Licia, with a shudder.

Even as she spoke the mists parted, and now quite plainly in the sunlight she saw the two men that



seemed to scramble up from the very jaws of the earth there among the rocks, and who disappeared together over the ridge. Tall, stalwart fellows they were and clad in the loose, ill-fitting garb of the mountaineer; what could it mean? Stranger even than the wraiths that beckoned her seemed it to Licia to see these mountain men up there on the Rift ridge.

"Ha'nts' groun'," it had always been, this riven, rocky ledge, all circled about with stories, weird legends born of the mists perhaps, and full of the pathos that is ever found in the lore of a simple folk who live forever in the clouds. As the years passed these stories had grown with the telling, paradoxically waxing stronger as their age increased, till more and more the mountain people had come to shun the mist-wrapped ridge, with its narrow, broken ledge jutting far out over the wooded gorge.

"It war ever a God-fursaken place, the Rift ridge war," Granny McDermot always said. "He air jes' lef' it to ha'nts an' sech, that bare ledge up thar 'mongst the clouds, an' folks as sense the workin's er His onseen han' knows He never rifted them rocks fur nothin'. It air onhallered groun', that air, an' nought but evil comes ter them as meddles with it. In His own good time the Lord 'll sen' it all, piece by piece, down inter the darkness. That air a true word, fur two rifts I've knowed up thar in my day an' time, an' likely them as come afore me knowed more; I dunno, I dunno! Mebbe it war the fust 'un that come early in my day, but even then, howsomever, the place war kinder onmolested, an' we'uns never heard er the Rift tell Ab Somers he foun' it. Ab war a wild 'un, he war, an' they do say he come

here with a price erpun his head, but howsomever that may be, he gin'ly managed ter keep hisse'f skurce in the daytime, an' oncet when the sheriff an' his posse fum over the mountings yon way come hereabouts kinder still an' sarchin' like, Ab he warn't no whar ter be foun', an' arter while, whenst he did turn up, he tol' erbout the Rift 'crost the ledge up thar. Jes' a narrow crack he said it war, cuttin' the rocks crostwise fum the ridge, an' they do say as how Ab oughter know, sence he had crope inter the Rift, er hidin' tell the sheriff war out'n the way. Ab war a cute 'un, anyhow, he war, an' purty ter look at, but somehow folks didn't seem ter take ter him; leastways none but 'Riah Peddy. 'Spite er ever'thing, whatsomever a man may be, thar's some woman somewhar fool enough ter keer fur him; and sech er one war 'Riah. Wrastle with her how they mought, her Pa an' Ma couldn't ween her off'n Ab Somers, oncet she sot her head thater way. So we'uns warn't 'sprised none whenst one mornin' Ab an' 'Riah war both gone; nobody knowed how nur whar. Arter 'while, tho', folks comin' fum down the cove thar ter the west'ard 'lowed that now an' ergin, when the sun hung low, techin' only on the high lan's, they viewed sometimes a man an' a woman up thar on the ridge, Ab an' 'Riah mo'n likely hidin' in the Rift. Howsomever, nobody have ever seed hair nur hide uv 'em fum that good day ter this, an' thar's reason ernough fur not seein' 'em, too, sence 'twar 'long er that time the big herricance come, strippin' the mountings an' snappin' down trees same as yer'd break off a witch-hazel switch fer a toothbrush. 'Twar that storm as opened the cl'arin' thar overlookin' the valley, an' in the

thick er the thunder an' lightin' we'uns here on the spurs heared a soun' that echoed an' viberated 'ginst the mounting side like the Day er Judgment come ter han', and whenst it war all over we seen the Rift had parted, the overhangin' ledge had fell, mo'n likely takin' Ab an' 'Riah erlong with it an' buryin' uv 'em furever down thar in the darkness 'mongst the trees.

"Howsomever, they have never been viewed theyse'ves sence the night er the leavin', the'r ha'nts may be seen when the mist is white on the ridge, an' the soun' er the'r voices is heared tell yit when the winds wail in the gorge an' scream 'roun' them scarred an' riven rocks up thar. But woe ter them as happens ter view the ha'nts, er hears po' Ab an' 'Riah screechin' in the win'! Many er one thar be as have viewed the wraiths ter the'r sorrow, but 'long er the fust war little Millisy Mathis down ter the cove. One mornin', whilst she war crostin' the spur thar, her an' her little brother Bud—him as runs the tanyard yonder ter the crost-roads—Millisy she chance ter turn her eyes twodes the Rift, kinder onbeknowinst like, an' way up thar in the mist she seen the wraiths uv Ab an' 'Riah. Skurce turned 'er fifteen she war then, but afore the year war out the po' chile scrambled up thar ter the Rift rock an' slid down over the precipice ter hide a shame she daresn't face.

"Prit nigh twenty years passed, with now an' then some one nuther seein' the ha'nts up thar on the ridge, an' whosomever viewed 'em, bad luck war sho ter foller. 'Longer them days the purtiest gal in the mountings war Hester Levan. Whenst the trees is bare, acrost the gorge thar on the nex' spur, you kin

view the ol' Levan cabin, empty these eight year, whar Hester lived. She war allus purty, Hester war, ef I do say it, an' thar warn't nair young man in all the mounting side as didn't want her; but thar warn't never but one that she ever seemed ter favor none. Howsomever, I 'lowed fum the fust she somehow helt her head too high fur sech as come fum hereabouts. Thar's some folks as thinks the best uv ever'thing comes fum far off, an' Hester war thater way."

Just who the favored of Hester's fickle fancy might have been, Granny herself did not say, but upon the mountain side—the story ran, that back in the sixties, when Bill Teague left home with a gun on his shoulder—he carried with him Hester Levan's promised word. Be that as it may, however, certain it is that he found no bride awaiting him when the war was over and he came home.

"The misfort'n all come er Hester's viewin' the ha'nts o' the Rift," Granny always said. "One morin' early, soon arter the boys war mostly gone off in the army, Hester 'lowed she viewed Ab an' 'Riah plain as day up thar on the rocks, wavin' an' beck'nin' ter her out'n the mist. Somehow, nuther, it never seem ter pester her none; she's allus so pyert, Hester war, an' us'n ter do as she please. Even when thar never come no news er the boys, an' ever'body was pestered some, 'specially them as had men gone in the army, Hester she didn't seem ter keer much. It war mighty little we'uns heared, too, in them days, sho'. 'Twas all so fur 'way, the war was; even Chicamauga an' Missionary Ridge didn't seem ter be nigh ernough ter hurt much. It was only when one er the boys 'ud come stragglin' back with a arm er a

leg lef' behin' in the valley, er sometimes whenst the raiders dashed over the mountings that we'uns heard tell er the war. 'Longerbout the time Hester Levan viewed the ha'nts, Gin'l Forrest an' his men clum' up the mountings, thar under the Point, ter the south'-ard an' swep' over the ridge. The evenin' er that same day, jes' as the sun settled twixt them two ridges over thar crost the valley, Hester Levan, er trapsin' th'ough the underbresh lookin' fur her ol' muley that was over late er comin' ter the cow-pen, looked up crost the gorge an' seen on the Rift ridge thar the figer uv a man 'ginst the sky. So plain she viewed him tell she knowed him ter be a soljer, an' whilst she still looked she seen him drap out er sight as ef the earth had opened an' swallowed him up. She war ever a cute 'un, Hester war, an' skeered er nothin'; so jest' leavin' the cow ter git home in her own good time, she sot the milk-pail down by the spring an' sayin' naught ter no one, she clum' up the ridge thar tell she come ter the very top whar she'd viewed the man. Then she seen what we'uns hadn't s'picioned afore, that a new Rift was openin' in the rocks. 'Twar inter this the man had slipped—McAlpine his name war, Major McAlpine—an' Hester foun' him a' most dead with w'ariness an' outdone with pain, sence he'd broke his leg whenst he fell, an' was jes' hangin' thar ter the sides er the Rift. They do say that fum the time Hester seen him hangin' thar she had heart nur thought fur no man else in all the worl'. Howsomever that may be, leastways she did have him tuck down ter the cabin crost thar, whar her an' ol' Miss Levan, Hester's ma what uster

be, they nussed him back ter health an' strenk, an' arter while, whenst he lef', Hester went 'long, too, as his wife."

"But that warn't bad luck, Granny," Licia had said, romantic little soul that she was, when the old woman told her the story long ago.

"Wait an' see, wait an' see, chile," Granny had said. "Misfortin's sho ter foller them as views the ha'nts o' the Rift ridge."

"Misfortin' ernough to a married a valley man," Bill Teague had said, when he came home to find no bride awaiting him. It was not till long afterwards that he consoled himself with Granny's pretty granddaughter, the sweet, young thing, who was Licia's mother, and who had died when the girl was born.

It was of all this that Licia was thinking as she stood there in the early morning and saw the wraiths o' the Rift beckoning to her in the mists. Would they bring ill-luck to her, she wondered, or, perhaps, the fate that had come to Hester Levan?

Then she thought of something else, this slim, young maiden with her head in the clouds. There seemed to come to her a vision of a lonely little girl, scarce more than a wide-eyed, curly-haired toddler, who had sat on the cold stones under the trees, looking across the gorge at the blue smoke swirling up from the Levan cabin, and wondering what they were doing over there, the woman—widowed now—who had found her love in the Rift so long ago, and the child whom she had brought back with her to the mountains. She remembered, too, that as the little girl had sat dreaming there had come scrambling up

under the rocks through the underbrush, a boy with a russet light in his rough, curling hair, and a glow of color in all his sunburnt face. Licia remembered how brightly his eyes had shone when he saw her, this young Dan McAlpine, Hester Levan's son, and how his clear voice had echoed on the mountain side. What a glad day that had been to her, and afterwards! It seemed to Licia that she remembered everything; the little windmill he had set for her, where the water gurgled over the stones beneath the laurel; the snares for birds, which he had made among the underbrush; the whistles he had turned for her eager lips, and the songs he taught her to sing till the echo of them came back to her in her shrill child's voice across the years. She could smell again the odor of the sweet fern that he brought back with him from the Rift, when he had scrambled up there once, and hear his laugh as he called to her to look at him standing high on the ledge, while she hid her eyes lest they should see him going down into the darkness. But better than all, perhaps, she remembered the day, eight years ago now, when Dan came to tell her goodby; his father's people had sent for them, and he and his mother were going back to the valley again. Licia was only a slim little thing of ten then, and Dan had taken her tearful face in his two hands and kissed it.

"Don't cry, dear; don't cry," he had said, gently. "Some day I shall come back and take you away, just as father did mother long ago. Don't cry, and don't forget."

Not to cry, that had been hard, but not to forget?



Ah, me! Do women ever forget—women, who remember with their hearts? Had she forgotten, she who had waited through the years? Did she forget when she saw the wraiths beckoning to her in the mist? Was it a premonition of evil that made her heart cease to beat when she saw the men scramble up out of the Rift on the “ha’nts’ ground?”

## CHAPTER V.

Bill Teague, riding up through the trees, into the little rocky trail that led from the gorge below, drew rein sharply when he saw the girl still leaning upon the fence overlooking the road.

“You air up early,” he said shortly. It was a saying common among the mountain people that Teague’s daughter was “too cute fur him.” “Bill air too darn ‘cute hisse’f’ ter stomach his wimmin folks knowin’ as much as he do,” they said.

Be that as it may, certain it is that of late since Teague had taken to consorting with men who were sometimes found doing deeds not the most irreproachable, there had seemed to spring up a kind of antagonism between him and his daughter. Her clear blue eyes seemed to pierce him through and through, and it did not please him.

“It air better ter be up early than late, I’m thinkin’,” she said now, watching his heavy, slouching figure, as he led the foam-flecked sorrel through the little creaking gate.

The noise disturbed a rooster that had been sur-



prised into tardiness by the belated daylight, and the big bird stretched his damp wings up overhead in the spreading chestnut, his shrill voice echoing loudly on the mountain side. The awakened calf lifted up his young voice pleadingly, and the mother mooed back coming consolation from the under-brush below; hens, noisy with their infant broods clucked and peeped in the wet grass, busy with the work of living. The day was begun, and Licia turned to its customary duties.

When she went into the house, Granny was already up and in her corner by the hearth. Penny Shackelford was laying the table, the dishes clattering noisily in her nimble fingers. Upon a low stool before the blazing fire Mrs. Teague sat, looking now and then at the crusty pones of corn-bread that crisped and browned in the oven before her, or turning the slices of odorous bacon that writhed and sputtered in their exuberant grease in the skillet on the coals.

"The Fort up ter Tracy burn yistiddy," said Teague, by and by. He had poured his smoking coffee into the saucer, and now stooped forward to blow upon it.

"We'uus viewed it," said Penny Shackelford, who was always ready to talk, even to her taciturn brother-in-law. "We went up ter the el'arin', time we seen the smoke, er skinnin' t'rough the underbresh like cata-mounts, an' every step, I fetched a scream."

In the mind of the nimble Penny there seemed to belong some peculiar merit in the "fetching" of this scream of hers, for she will tell about it with evident relish to this day.

"The old 'un had a vision the night afore," said Mrs. Teague in a subdued whisper, glancing over her shoulder at the dozing old woman. "She 'lowed as how evil would come ter them as lighted the fire."

Teague threw up his head, and looked across the room sharply at the silent, drowsing old woman. "The old 'un air 'cute," he said, after a pause, as he resumed his eating, "but she don't sense ever'thing. We'uns war too clost pressed: 'twar agin natur' ter s'pose we'd stan' ever'thing. What with capital er grindin' an' er squeezin' an' the convicts er doin' mo' an' mo' ever' year we'uns was bleeed ter turn. It air agin' natur' fur capital ter git ever'thing an' labor nothin'."

Just what Mrs. Teague comprehended by all this I shall not venture to say, but it seems probable that she conceived within the inner recesses of her unconvoluted brain the absorbing idea that Capital was a hard-fisted individual whose antics at the best of times was not to be depended upon, for she said quite calmly: "S'posin' Capital was ter inform, an' turn the law on the miners."

"Inform an' turn the law?" said Teague, with an unpleasant laugh. "Things have got past the law. Troops fum Nashville an' Chattanooga come up las' night. Happen they'll fin' the mountings none so easy ter level. Them as sent trundle-bed soljers to molest hill men mebbe'll live ter see naught but the leavin's uv 'em some'ars in the mountings onsuspected."

Licia looked up quickly as her father pushed his chair from the table, and left the house. Through

the open door-way she watched him busily making preparations for departure, and waited till the raw-boned sorrel disappeared with him over the ridge.

## CHAPTER VI.

The early sun was still low in the eastern sky when with quick, free step Licia swung herself down the slope that led to the gorge beneath the Rift ridge.

Above her head great gnarled oaks, scarred with the storm of years, stretched their scraggy branches, and giant chestnuts spread their big leaves, and shook their full green burrs. The sunlight stole through the branches of the red-bud, and showed now and then in some sheltered corner a belated rhododendron flower, fresh and sweet. Blackberry vines with their beaded fruit and starry-white blossoms tangled the way, and on either side a glory of golden-rod and iron-weed waved their yellow and purple plumes in perpetual defiance. Tiny orchids shot up ever and anon; little "monkey-flowers" with queer squint eyes peeped up from the wet grass. Everywhere slim-necked sun-flowers held aloft their black heads, golden-crowned and glorious, and ferns sent their toothed fronds or trailed in graceful maiden hair over the moss-covered stones. The very air was sweet with the breath of flower-laden morn, and now and then, from some shaded ledge, the startled leaves shook down their hoarded moisture shower-like, as Licia passed, while small wild fowls, shy and full-throated, made melody in the tree-tops.

How sweet it all was ! Yet the girl passed through like one in a dream, the fear in her heart growing more and more as she came nearer and nearer to the "ha'nts' groun."

When at length she had climbed up under the ledge, she stood upon the jutting rocks, awed and fearful. About the Rift's mouth there were tracks in the loose earth, and on the damp grass, but within, as she peered over, all was dark and still. Still it seemed, but not quite silent. Was it only the sighing of the wind through the fern-fronds, or did she hear the wraiths moaning in the darkness below ?

Following the line of the cleft, Licia came to the cliff's edge, and kneeling down and clinging to the jutting stones and springing shrubs, she scrambled over to a narrow ledge or shelf, six or eight feet below. Pressing close to the rocks, and still clinging to the branches she might look straight into the Rift's perpendicular opening. Hers must have been, at best, a dangerous foothold ; but it seemed that some higher sense, that was neither instinct nor reason, guided her. Meanwhile, the great white sun had swung round over the hilltops, and now there shot from it one long, narrow beam that pierced the Rift's darkness, dancing and quivering on the rough stones and through the waving ferns till it showed there within the cavernous depths, crushed and broken with its fall, the poor bruised body of a man. The sun beam kissed into gold the loose curls that had escaped from the little soldier's cap, and shone pityfully upon the wide visionless eyes. Without at the Rift's mouth, the girl felt the wild beating of her hopeless heart and saw the

light go out of her life." It was thus that Dan had come back to her.

Though Granny McDermot did not live to see the fulfillment of her prophecy, Bill Teague and Aaron Bennet have expiated with their own lives the crime of the Rift ridge, and the law is satisfied: but across the gorge, at the old Levan cabin where the mist is white on the mountains, two women, weary and sad-eyed, tell out their desolate days, united by the kinship of a common love and a common grief.



## A PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENT.

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IT was a pleasant February morning, the twittering of the birds on the pavement and in the big cottonwood trees making it seem quite gladsome without, and, by and by, the Judge began to feel the general stuffiness of the close office, and pulled his chair a little jerkily across the floor to the open window. He had a book in his hand, and held its pages open till he was seated. It was the "Blue Book," containing the list of Presidential appointments, which he seemed to be perusing so earnestly, holding it off at arm's length and running his finger along to note the salary attached to each office, now and then, perhaps a little unconsciously, marking one with his thumb nail. He paused a moment to turn over a leaf, and glanced out through the open window, peering over his glasses for a distant view. The street below was a quiet one, and the figure of a tall, spare man in a closely-buttoned cutaway coat, with a high silk hat and dangling cane, was a conspicuous one in comparison to the few leisurely going passers-by in simple morning attire.

"Yes, it is Everett," said the Judge to himself as the well-dressed man drew nearer, and he shut the book a little hastily and went across the room to put it on the table. He was still standing when the silk hat appeared up his stairway, and he called out quite cheerily :

"Good morning, Everett."

"Ah, as busy as ever, I see, Judge," said the man, shaking hands a little obsequiously. "I hardly hoped to find you down so early."

"Why it's nine o'clock," said the Judge, pulling out his watch. "I have been down for an hour. I think you are the early bird; a thriving young Congressman like you has no need to look out for the proverbial worm. You ought to leave that for us old fellows who are being laid on the shelf."

"O, well now, that is an idea," said the Congressman cheerfully, "but I think I ought to know how much likelihood there is of your being laid on the shelf."

The Judge laughed a little nervously at this kindly disclaimer, and the Congressman went on :

"Yes, I came out a little early this morning. I have only a few more days at home, and there's a good deal to be done. Thank you for taking care of this for me," and he picked up the book the Judge had put down so hastily.

"Quite a number of my kindly constituents are to call on me this morning, and I'm afraid I shall have a difficulty in 'placing' some of them."

He seemed quite elated at his own mild joke, and the Judge laughed tentatively.

"Yes, sir," the Congressman continued, "when a man with absolutely no political record, a man who has been of no more use to his party than the gamin is to the procession which he follows thro' the streets—when such a man I say, comes and asks for a fat office, it is nothing more nor less than unadulterated gall, and shows us the mighty wrong side of a campaign victory." He was not looking at the Judge as he spoke, and seemed quite carried away by his own enthusiasm. "Now, there are men, deserving, honorable men, who have upheld the party and kept its standard waving above the slime of degradation, men whom we would be glad to reward"—he spoke quite naturally—"and glad to have to the front now, for, I tell you, we want to keep our forces well mustered, we want to keep our posts well guarded. This is our deal now, fair and square, and we do not want to play a losing game." He was not on "the floor" and seemed a little reckless of his metaphors.

"The President is a mighty long-headed man, but the new bills are going to prove hard nuts to crack."

Everett spoke rapidly, but his quick eye had been glancing round the room, meanwhile taking in all its details.

There were holes in the matting on the floor, and dust on the books and the shelves and the tables. It had not been so once; it had not been so when he, a poor clerk in a grocer's store, had come at odd moments to borrow books of the Judge, and get him to explain difficult passages of Blackstone. He thought of it all now, and of how prosperous and



thriving the Judge was then, and how kindly and gracious withal. He thought of his own first case, which the Judge had given him, and of his maiden speech which the Judge had coached him for; he remembered how he had brought down the laughter of the Court by beginning "Mr. Speaker," instead of "Gentlemen of the Jury," and how the Judge had patted him on the back when it was over and told him his *lapsus linguae* was a good sign, and that some day he would be saying "Mr. Speaker" in earnest from the floor. Yes, he remembered it all now, and it had come true for him—but the Judge? He felt sorry he had not kept up with him during the years he had been in Washington; perhaps he was being laid on the shelf. To be sure he looked old and worn.

The Congressman was thinking of all this while he had been speaking, and his finger kept running over the leaves of the book which he held in his hand. He snapped the covers together nervously.

"I tell you what, Judge," he said, "I wish you wanted an appointment and you'd let me get one for you. I'd like to wipe out some old scores with you in that way."

The Judge's eyes fell, and he flicked a speck of dust from his worn coat-sleeve before he replied. There was a little nervousness in his manner, but his words were quite direct.

"Thank you, Everett," he said simply, "I have been thinking I would like a good quiet place."

The Congressman's intentions were the best, but the Judge's reply seemed to stagger him for a moment.

He pressed his lips together, hardening his pleasant face, but his words were kindly.

"Well, now, I'm sure I'm glad to hear it, Judge," he said, "and I think we will have no difficulty in arranging it."

He sat down on the straight office chair, pressing his thin knees close together, and leaning his slender body forward, resting his elbows on the table.

"If you'll just go through this list with me," he went on, and there was a business-like brusqueness in his tone, "we might see what there is left."

He turned to the list of first-class appointments, running his bony finger down the line and telling off names as he went.

"There's England now, that's for Massachusetts, of course; and France, Illinois will get that, and so on. No, there's nothing there. Let me see, how'd you like a consulate? Some pretty good places, light work, enough salary, you know. Here, how's this? That's not bad. Got any choice of place, Judge?"

"Well, I don't know; it just came into my head a moment before you came up. I think on a venture, I should say that I wanted a mild climate," said the Judge, a little vaguely.

"Yes, of course," continued the Congressman, still following the route of his finger. "Now there's Mexico, or Peru, or Bolivia. Let me see, some good places on the other side, in Italy perhaps, or Ireland, that's pretty good. I wish I'd known about this thing sooner; I've promised so many of the places. But here, now, holding the book to the Judge, "how's

this? Right smart salary, ain't it? Suppose we see what we can do with that."

He arose as he spoke, taking the Judge's assent for granted, but his graciousness returned as he got upon his feet and looked down at the old man beside him.

He gave a very hearty handshake, saying: "Now, Judge, I want you to count upon my doing everything possible in this matter, and, believe me, it will give me great pleasure. We'll send in a perfect reveille of letters and so on. Of course, everything will have to pass through the senior Senator's hands; but you know him, don't you? Yes; I thought so. Well, I think we may count upon him in this matter, and, at any rate, you may upon me."

The Congressman seemed willing and sincere enough, but the thing had not passed off just according to the Judge's desire. Accustomed as he was to granting favors, he was new to the business of asking them, and the unwonted effort galled him. He hoped the thing would not be talked about until it was quite settled, and it made him wince a few mornings later, when the paper contained the announcement that "Judge Acton was prominently spoken of for an important foreign post."

His friends were enthusiastic; the several local papers were exuberant in their laudation.

One thing about it, they said, was that the Judge's record did not have to be looked up. This was because everybody knew it; everybody knew his private character to be one of unparalleled purity, his private life to be one of unostentatious philanthropy. His

public career was unimpeachable; every one who knew anything of the political history of the State was familiar with the Judge's staunch adherence to party lines, and party principles. So the community discussed it, were elated and felt that the matter was settled. The Board of Trade, it is true, sent a testimonial in the Judge's behalf, not that they felt that it was needed at all, but just by way of showing their appreciation of the choice which they felt assured would be made. Thus summarily are many weighty matters settled by those who have no finger in the governmental pie. Numerous friends in other States wrote to the Judge, giving him hearty and previous congratulations, telling him that they had written to their various Senators, each one of whom it was always said, "had the ear of the President," giving the Judge what they usually called "a rouser." Thus it seemed that so far as might be seen all was done that could be, and there was nothing left but to await the grinding of the mill of the gods.

The person who said least and doubtless thought most about the Judge's appointment was Ruth.

When Mrs. Acton looked up from her knitting to say: "Ruth, since your father has asked for the appointment, I want him to get it." That worthy lady had, then and there, as she would have expressed it, "said her say."

Mrs. Acton was one who always spoke with reserves; reserves that grew by harboring, and were, invariably, ready for emergencies.

So Ruth had not discussed the matter with her mother. She simply awaited an emergency, hoping

one would come to break down her reserves. She appreciated the sensitiveness her father might feel while the matter was still in doubt, and went out of her way to respect it.

But as I have intimated, she did a deal of thinking, for Ruth was a young woman possessed of aspirations, of that peculiar kind of restlessness which usually passes muster under the name of ambition, and one of her innermost desires had been to get away from the narrow confines of the small city, wherein she had passed almost her only life, and, added to this, was an over-weening desire to go abroad.

Now that there was a probability of this, she was forced to content herself with only thinking of her desire, and strengthened her hope with her mother's decision that, since her father had asked for a place, she wanted him to get it.

Singularly enough, the only person whom she felt inclined to talk to about it was John—John Hume—and now he was gone, she knew not where, and it did not make things easier for her to reflect that she had herself been the cause of his going. But with all of her reflections she could not bring herself to think it was anything but stupid of John to go off as he had done. Hadn't he been asking her to marry him once a year ever since she could remember, and hadn't she always given him the same answer?

And now, it did seem too utterly stupid of him to say that, since she was older he supposed she knew her own mind and that he would go away and not trouble her any more.

Just as tho' she hadn't known her own mind all along.

John was a deal too masterful, and, to be sure, she was not sorry she had said "no" to him, but she couldn't help wishing he hadn't gotten in a huff and gone off like that to nobody knew where, just at a time when she most wanted him. Ruth kept thinking of this after she had looked up her *Meisterschaff* and set to studying in case she had to go abroad; perhaps that's the reason she made so little progress with her grammar.

## CHAPTER II.

It was one of those blustering, windy nights toward the middle of March when John Hume got home. Just why John had decided to shut up his Washington apartments sooner than was necessary and to run down home for a brief visit he did not quite acknowledge to himself, but merely said that he would like a last glimpse of the old place to carry away with him, to remember when he was so far away and so long gone. There was no one to say good-by to—no one except Ruth, and he should not see her, probably.

He was thinking of all this the night he got home, and was walking up from the station to his old quarters. He calculated that none of the boys would have come in at that hour, and that he could look up a few papers that he wanted, and have a good, quiet, cozy time of it. He knew that Jessup, his old roommate, would have left plenty of coals in the grate, and he felt quite gratified that a comfortable glow stole out beneath the door to greet him as he mounted the dusty stairway.

Everything was just as he had expected to find it; even his individual post-box on the door was full of things Jessup had neglected to send. He took them out, the bundles of newspapers and a few letters, carrying them in with him and dumping them down on the table along with his grip.

Within, too, all seemed quite as of old, but somehow he couldn't help feeling sorry, after all, that he hadn't wired Jessup he was coming. The little fellow's cheerfulness would have made his home-coming happier, his last glimpse of the old place brighter. He had a passing thought of going out to look the boys up, but his trip had been a fatiguing one, so he emptied Jessup's tea-kettle and got the cinders and dust from his face and hands, found his own big slippers in their accustomed corner, and drew up a chair to the table, stretching his long limbs to the fire's cheerful warmth.

It was nice to be at home, and he fell to wondering if, after all, he should see Ruth. Perhaps he would meet her in the street, as a thousand times he had thought of meeting her while he was gone, with the wind rumpling her loose curls, and the dear look in her bright eyes, and the smile on her sweet lips. He had thought of her so often, and the pain of it all was still in his heart; what would it be when he was gone so far away?

He brushed his hands across his eyes as if to shut out a vision, and picking up one of the dusty papers he had brought in, he began to open it listlessly. The first thing that caught his eye was Judge Acton's name at the head of a column, and, like one awakening



from a dream, he read of his probable appointment. He had heard nothing of it and he read the whole thing twice over before he seemed to understand, then, blowing a long, low, whistle he threw the paper down beside him on the floor.

Jessup's step was heard mounting the stair, and in a moment the little fellow burst in, fairly kissing Hume in the exuberance of his delight at seeing him.

"Why didn't you let a man know you were coming?" he said, frisking about the room in his nervous little way. "I'd have had the boys in to glorify. Why didn't you write to a fellow, anyhow? Why, you had me here pining my young life away, believing you had gone to that nether region you casually mentioned the night you flew off like a shot out of a shovel, to the Lord-knows-where. Say, why didn't you write?"

"Write?" said Hume. "You are a great one to talk about writing; why in the mischief didn't you write?"

"I? Why I had nothing to write," said Jessup, helplessly.

"Oh, you didn't? Well why didn't you send the papers?" said Hume, picking up the one at his feet.

"Oh, come now, but that is a good one," said Jessup, going off in a fit of laughter. "Where out of the world have you been that you wanted to see our papers? Did you want to know what we thought of the Toronto question? Did you want to see us settle the free art bill with one stroke of our mighty pen? Or did you want to know that Bill Jones was adding a new coat of paint to his palatial residence, that the



honorable Mayor was out again after a protracted spr—beg pardon—illness, that our old friend John Smith from Hog Thief Point, was in town yesterday, and, last, but not least, that there are no flies on”—

“Hush, Jessup, can’t you?” said Hume, breaking in a little sharply. “I think you might have written me about—Judge Acton’s appointment, for instance.”

“Phew!” said Jessup, “sits the wind in that quarter yet? I didn’t know you would feel interested, as all was over twixt you and Ruth.” Hume winced.

“Besides,” Jessup went on, “he hasn’t got it yet, and probably never will. Kissing goes by favor, and things seem to be moving slowly in Washington.”

“Do you suppose such a man as Judge Acton wouldn’t get what he asked for?” demanded Hume.

“I’ve seen as good men as he refused what they asked for,” said the little fellow significantly.

“Stop that, Jessup,” said Hume, doggedly. “You know I wasn’t worthy to fasten her shoe latchet.”

“Oh, I know,” answered the loyal little man, looking up at his big friend, “you’re not worth wiping up the floor with. If you were, I’d do it, sir, I’d do it.”

“Well, well, we shall make it all right, Jessup, old boy,” said Hume, slipping off his slipper and throwing one arm caressingly about the little fellow’s shoulders.

“Would you mind sitting up for me a bit? I shall not be gone long, and I’ll get you to call me early in the morning, please, Jess; I’ve got to go to Washington.”

“You have, have you? What did you come for?”

“To see you, Jessup, of course,” broke in Hume,

softly, but the little fellow didn't feign to notice the interruption.

"What did you come for? A chunk of fire? Well, I'll 'fire' you early enough in the morning, be sure."

Hume ran down stairs and hurried up the street to the telegraph office in a vague kind of way, feeling that he could thus help along on its journey the message he was going to send. He picked up a blank, addressed it to his Senior Senator at Washington, filling it in without counting the words.

When he got back home he was very gentle with little Jessup, who had refilled the cup of tea for him in the old way.

### CHAPTER III.

It had been arranged that the Congressman was to give a reception in honor of Judge Acton's departure when the family stopped in Washington on their way to New York whence they were to sail. It was a very swell affair, of course, when it came off, and next to the Congressman's beautiful wife, Ruth was quite the prettiest thing there, and she was having a perfectly lovely time.

At least she kept telling herself over and over again that she was enjoying the cram and the rush, the meeting so many charming people, but she was haunted by the dreadful thought that she was going to break down in the midst of it all and cry. There was a man standing with his back to her just behind a group of palms; he had been there a long time and

he reminded her of John. If only it were John she would feel better; then, after a while, she could see him and tell him good-by.

The Congressman himself was talking to her, and when he stopped she thought she had better thank him for having gotten the appointment for her father. Somehow the echo of her words sounded very insincere, and looking up at him a little pleadingly, she said: "Indeed, I am very grateful to you, and I know it was all owing to you that the place was given father, the Senator was very lagging."

The Congressman began to say something in reply, but she did not hear what it was. The man behind the palms had moved, and—yes, it was John, and he was coming to her; it had been so long since she saw him, and she wanted to tell him good-by. No, he was going the other way; but surely he had seen her. What could it mean? For John Hume's kind, gray eyes looked full into hers for a brief second, he bent his head a little stiffly and was gone.

The Congressman stopped short in what he was saying, glanced over his shoulder at Hume's retreating figure, and wondered if Ruth was quite the flirt she seemed. When he turned to look at her again, something in the girl's downcast face struck him.

"There seems to be a little lull just now," he said, bending to offer his arm, "and I'm afraid I shall not have another opportunity to show you my orchids. Will you let me take you now?"

The girl slipped her hand through his arm gratefully, glad to escape the glare of lights upon her burning face and sank back well into the shadow

of the vines in a quiet corner where he had found her a seat.

"Well, Miss Acton," he said, after a little, "I'm afraid I can't legitimately lay claim to all the thanks you were so gracious as to offer me a while ago. Of course you know, I wanted to do what I could for your father, but when I put the matter to the Senator, he told me he had already promised the place to—" the Congressman paused a moment, "to—er—someone else. This particular some one else happened to be a young fellow who was anxious to go to the antipodes, if possible, on some pretext or another, just then, and the Senator was going to give him all his influence. Had known the young man's father, you know, and that sort of thing, and was disposed to let the fellow have anything he wanted, and he had settled upon the very place the Judge had thought of. So that's the state of affairs I found when I got here. Well, perhaps, I don't know exactly where the hitch was, but at the last minute—the very day before the appointment was to be made, in fact—the young fellow called off, said he didn't want it, and it was given to your father. So, you see, it is to him, the young man, that your thanks are due."

"Who is he? What is his name?" asked Ruth, breathlessly.

"Hume, you know, John Hume," said the Congressman, feeling that his plot had wound up a little tamely, perhaps, after all.

"Oh! Oh!" said Ruth, covering her face with her hands and bowing her head upon the flower-decked stand before her.

She did not look up when the Congressman went out, closing the door softly behind him. A moment later, with an ice in his hand, he met Hume in the hall.

"Would you mind taking this into the conservatory and doing the gallant in my stead? I'm busy," he said, hurrying on as he put the plate into the young man's hand.

Perhaps John didn't suspect anything, perhaps he hoped everything. At all events, when he opened the door and found Ruth, with her head still bowed upon the table, he put one of his big palms over her little hand and called to her gently.

"Oh, John!" she cried, springing up, "to think of your having done that! Of your having given up your place to father, and then letting us go on and never have a chance to say a word to you about it! Never mind now, I know all about it, the Congressman has told me part, and I guessed the rest. And you were going to let us go away without even saying good-by to you. Oh, John!"

"Good-by," said John. "Is that all you wanted to say, Ruth?"

The tears were still standing in her gladsome eyes, and she hung her head so low that her words came only in a whisper, but he heard.

"No, that isn't quite all, for I love you, John."



## HOW HANK AND HIS FOLKS SAW THE SHOW.

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HANK pulled his horses close to the sidewalk and stood up in the wagon, looking wistfully at the big bills which the man was busily pasting to the long stretch of high wall by the cotton-yard.

"Gwine to be a show in town?" he asked good-naturedly.

"Yes, sir," said the man with the paste-pot, glancing carelessly over his shoulder.

"Gwine to be a big 'un, ain't it?" Hank went on.

"Biggest you ever saw," said the man giving a vigorous sweep of the brush.

Hank grinned down on the man's broad back complacently, pushed his dirty white hat up on his head, and said:

"'Taint wuth your while to put them words in the paper 'bout your show, mister. It wouldn't be fur out er sight at that rate, certain, beein's how I ain't never saw a show."

"Say you haven't?" It was the man's turn to

grin now, and he did so broadly. "Well, my friend, you ought to see this one."

"Well, I'm blest ef I warn't stud'in' 'bout that when I seen you stickin' them pitchers up. I jess 'lowed as how maybe I'd come an' fetch Molly an' the chillun. Th' ain't nair one er my folks ever seen er show."

He gathered up the reins in one hand and sat down, leaning over the wagon-body in a confidential kind of way.

"Yes, I's jess stud'in' 'bout bringin' the folks in to this here show, but you know how 'tis. Times is plum powerful hard, an' crops is short ever'where."

"O, it won't cost much," said the man. "You just scratch around and pick up a few dimes and come along and bring Molly and the children."

"I'm blest ef I don't do it, mister," said Hank with a burst of enthusiasm. "What time'd you say the show'd be here?"

"On the twelfth."

"The twelfth. That's nex' Saddy week, ain't it?" said Hank musingly. "Well, now, that's the very day I's aimin' to come in with the cotton anyhow, so I'm blest ef I don't put Molly an' the chillun in the wagin too, an' haul 'em in to the show."

"That's right," said the man, gathering up his pots and bills.

"Yes, sir, we'll be on han' an' don't you forget it. Say, you may jess count on me an' Molly an' the chillun," Hank called over his shoulder.

He took a last lingering look at the gorgeous pictures, before he turned his horses' heads down the



dusty street which led to the bridge across the creek. Somehow he felt quite joyous as he whipped up the poor tough little ponies, their shoes clinking noisily against the stones, and the loose cotton-ties in the big wagon rattling a cheerful accompaniment.

"Gwine to be a circus in town, Molly," said Hank, when he got home and she had come out to see him unhitch, leaning lazily against the fence with the baby in her arms.

"You don't say!" she ejaculated.

"Yes," he went on with growing enthusiasm, "gwine to be a circus, an' a big 'un, too. A feller was tellin' me. An' what you reckon I'm a min' to do, Molly?"

"Don't know, Hank," she said a little tentatively.

"Guess, ol' 'oman," he said, hilariously, flipping at the baby with the end of the bridle reins.

"Reckon you aim to go to the show, don't you Hank?" she asked wistfully, when his back was turned as he stooped to unhitch a strap.

"That's what, ol' 'oman," he said joyously. "That's jess what, but there's mo' to it, an' you an' the chillun better be slickin' yourse'ves up for I aim to take you all along too."

"To the circus?" she asked breathlessly.

"Yes, to the circus," Hank answered with manifest pride in his decision. "I studied it all out when I's comin' home. You see, it's to be nex' Saddy week, an' I's aimin' to take the cotton in that day anyhow, so it couldn't a hit handier. Now you an' the chillun jess git ready an' we'll g'long an' have a look at all them things I seen in the pitchers. Might's

well do it, you know. Markham will be owin' us some on the cotton, an' I speek you want to do a little tradin' anyhow. So we'll jess go, that's what."

Now, Hank and his wife were simple folk, belonging to that extensive class of individuals who are usually spoken of as "having a hard time of it." If this meant that no matter how favorable the season elsewhere, Hank's little rocky hillside ranch was sure to have too much or too little rain; if it meant that his corn and cotton and potatoes somehow or other as he said, "never seemed to hit;" if it meant that his horses and cows were always underfed, that Molly was put to it to keep her constantly-increasing and ever-stretching brood in the merest suspicion of a supply of clothes, that her chickens were in a chronic state of disease, being bandied about busily between cholera and the pips from one year's end to the other; that her housework was never finished by nightfall and always had to be left over for next day: if all this meant "having a hard time" then Hank and Molly certainly had it. The only thing that grew and prospered on the whole stoney little place were the children. As Molly's neighbors said of her, "she sholy seem to have good luck with the young ones." There were all ages and sizes of them, as many as could crowd in between Sim, a lank lad of ten, and little Moll, the baby girl.

But in spite of the hard times, it was quite a joyous party that set out to the circus when Saturday came, for it takes more than short crops and long drouths to down an improvident spirit. From their high perch on the cotton bales beneath the pent-house of the overstretched wagon-sheet, the children poked

their tow-heads, anon shouting out in happy young voices, or gurgling a suppressed giggle at the unwonted excitement. Hank chirruped cheerily to the ponies, his sunburnt face beaming with good-natured anticipations, and by his side, with the baby in her arms, sat Molly, resplendent in her faded red calico and white sunbonnet.

It was still quite early when they got to town and Hank drove first to the cotton-yard and dumped his two precious bales out among the many brown-sacked bundles which lay there in careless array, their plethoric sides bursting with fleecy whiteness.

"I'll jess drive 'roun to the square, Molly," he said, "an' you and the chillun can set there in the wagin 'till I see Markham an' have a settlement. Then I'll come fur you an' we'll see the show, and ever'thing that's gwine. We ain't aimin' to do no half-way business on this here circus, air we Sim? You bet, we'll jess natchelly do the thing up right. I ain't no slouch when it comes to a show, no how, ef I ain't never been to one."

Hank's great good-nature must have been contagious, for Markham beamed upon him benignantly, and shook his hand as cordially as if his meagre two bales had been multiplied by a hundred.

"Come in to the show, did you Hank?" he asked, rubbing his hands together cheerfully, and smiling up into Hank's face.

"Yes," said Hank, broadly. "'Lowed maybe times warn't so hard that a feller couldn't afford a little fun. Never made nothin' wuth layin' by nohow, an' might's well git the good er what there is, that's what I say. But I brought the cotton along, an' I'd

like to have a *settlement* with you right away ef you've got the time. You see, I brought Molly an' the chillun along too, an' they air settin' 'roun' yonder on the square waitin' fur me to come back, an' I want to git there soon as I kin."

"Just itemise Hank's bill for me, please," said Markham to the bookkeeper as he and Hank passed through the office in the cotton-yard.

"I'm glad you brought your cotton in to-day, Hank," he went on when the weighing and classing were over and they had come back into the office. "It jumped up a point yesterday.

"You don't say!" said Hank, feeling vaguely that whatever a "point" might be it meant quite an unlimited pinnacle to his pile of balance due. In it he saw a pair of boots for Sim, a dress for Molly and—

But Markham interrupted his vision.

"Here you are Hank, he said, taking up the long sheet from the bookkeeper's desk.

Hank's eyes followed Markham's finger slowly but uncomprehendingly down the long column of figures, and his heart gave a big jump at the end, when he heard still in the same cheery voice :

"Well, we'll credit you by the cotton to-day, and you see, that puts you pretty nearly square. You will owe us only eight dollars and fifty cents, and I can carry that till you can scrape up a few eggs and chickens for Christmas, maybe."

But Hank's ears were full. "I owe you eight dollars an' a ha'f?" he said breathlessly; "Why, Lord man, ain't there nothin' comin' to me?"

Markham looked up kindly over his glasses, but

the blow had been too great. Hank dropped down into a chair, covering his face with his hands.

"Good Lord!" he went on helplessly. "The cotton's ever'thing I've got in the worl'! I knowed there wouldn't be much comin' on it, but I's aimin' to git Sim a pair er boots an' Molly a new dress among 'em! Lord! Lord! An' you say there ain't nair cent comin' to me? An' Molly an' the chillun a-settin' 'round yonder in the wagin waitin' fur me to come an' take 'em to the show! Do you mean I've got to go an' tell 'em I ain't got a cent in the worl', an' we'll jess have to hitch up an' go 'long back home? Lord! Lord!" and the big tears were trickling down his cheeks.

The bookkeeper slid down from his stool, and went out softly, closing the door behind him. Markham took off his glasses and wiped them slowly. He had been a poor man once, and he knew how heavily some things bear upon simple folk, even those who are accustomed to "having a hard time."

"Well, well," he said kindly, running his hand in his pocket, "I reckon times are harder with you than they are with me, and you'd better let us call things square, and take this five dollar bill and go and get Molly and the children. It is almost time for the show."

Hank was no beggar, however used he was to hard times, but he had no power to compass the disappointment that would be waiting for him if he refused Markham's offer; but it was but a poor spiritless slouching figure that went by and by to join the expectant group in the wagon. He kept his fingers clasped on old Markham's bill in his pocket, and his

lips were tight pressed. But there was no time for explanations. Out tumbled the little towheads by twos and threes with Molly and the baby on top, for the music had already begun.

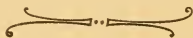
Up the street and around the square, turning down by the baker's shop came the procession, and oh! oh! was there ever anything grander to see? the puffing, smoking, screaming calliope, the gorgeous equestriennes, the rattling, rumbling cages, the strange wild things peering out with hungry eyes, the ponderous elephants with long snouts—was there ever anything like it all?

Never before to Hank and his folks surely, and is it any wonder that his drooping spirits revived and that along with the rest he gave himself up and followed in the wake of the steaming music across the creek and quite into the big tent itself? He gave up old Markham's bill at the door forgetful that there went along with it his whole worldly wealth, and by and by when it was all over and the wagon rattled noisily out on the homeward road, Molly said with a burst of recalled consciousness when the little cabin appeared in sight:

"Lor', Hank, we forgot the tradin'!"

Hank ran his hand down into the pocket where Markham's money had been, but he heard only vaguely, for a vision of the clown in his wide trousers danced before his eyes and the sound of music was in his ears:

"But we seen the show," he said softly.







'Sieur Antoine and Snow-white.  
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## SNOW-WHITE.

## CHAPTER I.

**N**OW very white she did look always, the dainty little one of Pierre and Felice, with her golden hair and her blue, sweet eyes, as she played among the brown-skinned, dusky-locked children in the sunshine of the old quarter. And it is little wonder that they called her "Snow-white," the dainty sweet one, for very white she must have looked to Pierre that morning when he found her lying on the door-step, with the snowflakes all about her, and only her round, baby-blue eyes showing out of the whiteness.

"See what Our Lady has sent us, Felice," he said, taking the precious bundle in his big, brown hands, and carrying it in to his wife. "A little snow-white baby."

Felice turned back the shawl, and brushed the snow-flakes from the baby's face, and there, sure enough, pinned to the little dress, was a card, and as Pierre bent down to see, he read, "For Pierre and Felice."

"There! Did I not say?" he exclaimed joyously, "it is for us that the Blessed Virgin has sent her."

And together they knelt, holding the little one between them, and giving thanks for her who had been sent to cheer their childless home and fill their empty hearts.

Only this they knew of the coming of the little one, but, when they carried her to Père Martin for his blessing, the old priest remembered the slight, graceful woman who knelt so long at Vespers the evening before, and who had, when the service was over, questioned him about the same Felice, the coiffeuse, and Pierre, her husband, who lived in the crumbling grey house beyond the church. He remembered too that the hand which dropped into his the heavy purse of gold, wore no ring upon its third finger, and Père Martin sighed as he looked into the baby's face, and murmured, "Another lamb for the fold."

But he did not speak of what he remembered: instead, he only told Pierre and Felice that he would himself go with them to the office of the old notaire on the corner where all could be arranged, and that the next day after Mass they might bring the child to be christened.

And so they did, giving her the name of Snow-white. No other name would have suited her half so well. Snow-white she was when Pierre found her, and snow-white Felice always kept her. She was never too busy to put a few dainty tucks in baby's white slip, or to wash her face and brush her yellow curls. And Pierre never came up stairs now without stopping to wash his hands at the big tub down in

the court, so that he might not soil baby's dress when he took her in his arms, and he kissed her, oh, so gently, lest he should leave the impress of his lips on her's. Somehow, too, his step grew lighter and his laugh cheerier. Even down on the levee, and at the warehouse where he worked all day lifting and turning the big cotton bales with his sharp hook, he would sometimes forget and laugh softly because of the little one at home. Felice's songs, too, grew gayer as she tripped about at her tidy house-work, and her coiffures were more elaborate and graceful than ever.

"It makes a difference, is it not so, madame?" she would say when she dressed the hair of a fond young mother, who, perhaps, sat the while gently swinging the cradle of her first-born, "it makes a difference that there is now a little heart for your big one to hold. I know, it is all changed with me now that the Blessed Virgin has sent us a little one. It makes nothing now that I must go up and down the stair, that I must bring the water from the cistern in the court, or that I must be forever crimping and curling and sticking in the pins."

And it did indeed seem that all the household was changed. It was not a very great household to be sure, for besides Pierre and Felice, there were only Marta and Babette and 'Sieur Antoine in the little grey house.

Marta lived on the first floor, and from her apartments there came always the pleasing odor of burnt sugar, for it was in her own little back room that she made the white and yellow ropes of candy that she sold upon the streets every day. What delight it was to

her when Snow-white could sit alone and hold in her chubby fist a stick of the crisp candy, sucking it till it ran down her wrists and chin and upon her little dress in streams of linked sweetness.

"It is by the reason that the little one likes it that I make this cream candy," she would say to her customers, and so go her way with a lighter step and a heavier purse because of the baby's coming.

But it was Babette who took care of Snow-white when Felice must be away. Babette was a blanchisseuse, and was always washing, washing, washing in the big tubs down in the court. When Snow-white was old enough and the days were mild, Babette would take her shawl, and spreading it out over the warm bricks, put the baby upon it, shading her little face from the sun with one of Pierre's big straw hats hung up on a stick. The child grew to love Babette, with her broad, round face, and her plump, white arms; grew to love the warm court where there was so much sunlight and always the splashing of water and the flapping of snowy clothes on the line.

And 'Sieur Antoine? Ah, yes; perhaps more than any one else 'Sieur Antoine came to love the little gift-child. At first he would only pause when he met Felice on the stair and inquire after the little one, but, by and by, he stopped in on his way up to his room to see the baby, all clean and sweet and white tucked away in her little bed. 'Sieur Antoine spoke but little: his violin talked for him, he would say, and he was always sad and often hungry too, Pierre thought. So when Snow-white was able to climb the stair without fear of her falling, Felice

sometimes would send her up to 'Sieur Antoine's room with a slice of bread or a bit of meat that he might find it waiting for him when he comes. But better than all this to the old man was just to have the child curl up in the window-seat and listen as he played, his music full of memories.

"What is it makes me hurt here when you play, 'Sieur Antonie?" the child would ask, putting her little hand over her heart, and standing close beside his knee with her eyes full of tears. "Is music then so sad."

"It is not music, little one," he would say, "it is life." It was the good Père Martin himself who used to come for the child when she was old enough to run about, and carry her with him to the church and to his own cozy little cottage behind with its vine-clad porch and its garden sweet with roses. He would pluck for her the heavy-headed buds that brushed her cheeks, and take her home with her apron full of flowers, or her hands full of oranges from the tree beside his window. "May I not give the Virgin some of my flowers?" the child would say as she picked the finest to lay at Mary's feet when they passed the church.

## CHAPTER II.

Thus among the good friends the little one grew and prospered, brightening the house and the square and the street with her presence. There was much to make her happy too; her good friends and the sun-

shine and the flowers and the pictures in the church and the Blessed Virgin, and the good St. Joseph. Besides her own little church that she knew and loved so well, was the Baptist Mission across the street, where there were no shrine and no candles, only just bare walls and benches. How drear it must be inside, the child thought as she sat by the open window watching the people come and go, their long, black shadows darting like big swallows on the pavement as they passed the light. Within the little organ squeaked and rasped, and once as she sat listening she heard the voices singing:

“Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

The child kept saying the words over and over to herself. What could they mean, she wondered, this little one had never seen a snow-fall.

“What is the snow like, Maman?” she would say, “and why do you call me Snow-white?”

“It is by the reason that my little one is pure like the snow itself, that I call her so;” Felice would answer. “Wait, petite, by and by you will see, perhaps, when the wind blows and the cold comes.”

“How white is the snow,” the child would ask, and taking a sample of cotton from the pocket of his blouse, Pierre would scatter the lint about her head saying, “whiter than that.”

“Whiter than this,” Babette told her when she took the frothy suds from the tubs, and threw them up into the air till they fell in tiny water-bits upon the ground.

“Whiter than these,” Père Martin would say as he lifted her up to his broad shoulder, and held her

aloft until her face was buried in a mass of orange blossoms above.

"This is a strange winter," said 'Sieur Antoine one night as he sat fingering his violin strings which were taut and dry with the cold.

"Will it snow," asked the child eagerly.

"Since eight years the snow has not come," said Felice, "and we remember it so well, is it not, the night before the little one came?"

"I remember," said Babette, "and was it like this, all still and grey? I would not cover my tubs that night thinking to catch the rain, and the next morning, were they not beautiful, those tubs?"

"Is it then so beautiful," asked the child. "Will you not take your violin 'Sieur Antoine, and tell me how it looks?"

And 'Sieur Antoine played. Those who knew felt the inaudible falling of the flakes, thicker and thicker, but gentle as the drawing of a shroud. He kept his eyes upon the child, and he saw her waiting, listening. Suddenly, with a twang of the strings and a twist of the bow, there came the jingle of sleigh-bells, the sound of merry voices, and the little one's face was glad. But 'Sieur Antoine forgot, and he played on and on in the minor chords, till tears stood in the child's eyes, and Felice put out her hand to stay him.

"Is it then like that and that, the snow," asked the little one when he was stopped. "Ah, it cannot be."

"Perhaps," said 'Sieur Antoine, and the others could not speak for fear; was it the music that held them? But the next day it was come. Snow-white

felt it when she opened her eyes that morning, and saw the daylight peeping in pale and strange thro' the curtains, and creeping to the window, she looked out. The streets were already busy and merry with the voices of children, and how glad a time it was in the old city where the snow so seldom came, but more than all else the little one felt the wondrous purity of the white world without, and with an echo of 'Sieur Antoine's snow music in her ears, she folded her hands and knelt down.

"Holy Mother of God, wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Ah, poor little one, how these old words came back to her afterwards, when this day was long since dead!

### CHAPTER III.

When again the peeping of the daylight thro' the parted curtains in the little grey house showed the snow piled high upon the street and housetop, only Pierre and Felice, with clasped hands, stood sadly by the window looking out, and, as once in the old sweet days, they had knelt and blessed the Virgin for giving them the little one, so now again they bowed together and prayed. What was it they were saying now, these bowed ones? Ah, I know not, only One heard, for they spoke not, for the prayer was in their hearts.

All day the snow fell, growing thicker and thicker, making even the air white with its whirling flakes, and,



as night came down, and the first lights began to shine across the little narrow street, a woman, scarce more than a child she seemed, with her rumpled yellow hair and her wide blue eyes, hurrying along in the cold, stopped now and then in a quiet doorway to rest. Was it the snow that blinded her eyes and hindered her feet, and what was it that kept sounding in her ears? Was it not then all true, all true the old sad music of 'Sieur Antoine's violin? Oh God! Oh God! if she had only known! And the woman pulled the shawl closer about her face; the snow was blinding her eyes. Where was he now, the good 'Sieur Antonie, and Felice and Pierre and Marta and Babette? Would they see her out there in the snow as she passed? The light shown but dimly thro' the drawn curtains of the little grey house, and the old Mission across the way was still and dark. What was it she had heard the voices singing there once in the old days?

"Wash me—" Oh God! Would anybody hear if she sang the old words over to herself? Holy Mother, keep yet a little while the chill that was creeping to her heart! Oh God, help till she might find Père Martin and confess! Poor little one, the burden was crushing her.

How quiet it was in the little church, where the candles burnt within the chancel sweet with the odor of incense. How quiet and how warm. Would they come by and by, the good Père Martin and Felice and Pierre, perhaps, and find her there waiting, their Snow-white little one?

Oh God! No. Snow-white no longer! Oh God!

The black shadows stole nearer and nearer. "*Ave Maria, plena gracia—*" the old words had slipped from her memory. How long had it been since she had said them? "Tho' thy sins be as scarlet—" what was the rest? Had she not heard once in the old days, or was Mary whispering in her ear as she lay now at her feet? The chill crept closer and closer, the blue eyes grew dim, but the lips parted, and One who called the Virgin mother heard the words of the old prayer: "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

By and by they found her with the old sweet smile upon her stilled lips, and the old childish look over all the calm features, and thus had the snow given them back their little one, and brought home the lamb to the fold.



## THOMAS MCTAIR AND HIS NANCY.

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**I** WAS riding slowly along on my tired sorrel nag, for reasons which I thought would be pleasure and I hoped would be profit, traversing the mountains of East Tennessee, not far from Jasper. I was in the very midst of the forest primeval: giant trees stretched their gnarled branches above my head, and scattered their brilliant leaves, weaving a carpet for my horse's feet more gorgeous than kings have trod. Away off in the lonely Sequatchie I could see the sloping ridges and spreading spurs, dovetailing into each other their crimson and yellow and purple till all faded alike into the distant blue, as the mountains lost themselves in the misty west. No sound broke the stillness, save now and then the barking of a squirrel cracking nuts in the big chestnut trees, or the late call of a wood-bird for his mate. I was musing on the mighty works of God, and the pitiful efforts of his unworthy creatures as I rode along, and wondering where I should get my supper, for I was what might be called decently hungry and

indecently thirsty. Suddenly, a sharp turn in the trail stuck my horse's nose almost into the very face of a man who sat on a rock by the roadside, staring straight before him. His head and chest were thrown forward, his chin had dropped below zero, his lank knees spread wide apart like the open jaws of a Louisiana alligator, and his hands hung limp at his side. A suit of brown jeans, so new that they smelt of the walnut-bark dye, clothed his thin stripe of manly form, and a shirt-collar of blue hickory, tarned down around a spare neck, to the very verge of which his fadey, straw-colored hair was plastered, sleek as a ball-room floor, with turkey-fat. A more perfect picture of abject misery I never saw before nor since, and I jerked my pony's head out of the man's face and leaned forward in my saddle to look at him.

"Got it bad?" I asked at last, when the creaking of his stiff clothes and the snort of his heavy breathing became embarrassingly audible in the quietude of the forest.

"That's what I hev, stranger," he said, lifting his jaw, but still keeping his eyes fixed straight ahead. "Ketched it in the neck an' the collar-bone an' the chist an' the breas'-bone, an' the heart an' the stomick an' the lights an' the livers an' the bowils an' the yuther lower regions. Facks er the business is, I've got it f'um the crownd er my ol' fool head to the soles er my big blamed foot. Got it all over."

"What gave it to you?"

He sprang to his seven feet of height with a yell that reverberated on the mountain side, jumped about

a yard from the ground, cracking his heels together as he came down again.

"What gin it to me, stranger?" he shouted when he had lit, "what gin it to me? Why Nancy, ov course. Who'd you s'pose? Cause why? Cause er these here plague-on clo'es what you see befo' you a-kiverin' this flabber-gasted ol' hide er mine. Look at 'em, stranger, look at 'em, fur Gawd's sake, fur their een is nigh at han'." And the fellow gyrated around among the dry leaves like a materialized whirlwind.

"Clothes?" said I. "What's the matter with your clothes? That's as good a suit as I've seen this side of Pennsylvania."

"Stranger, you don't mean it." he said softly, coming up close beside me, and fetching me a whack across my thigh that tingled all the way up my anatomy, creeping out at the end of my funny-bone. "Sho' now, you don't mean it."

"Yes, I do though, but what does Nancy say about it?" I answered.

"Stranger!" he said, leaning on my pony's neck, and looking up at me confidentially, "you see it's this 'er way. Me an' Nancy thar, 's been keepin' comp'ny nigh on to three year come the thirteen day er nex' December, an' things had about got whar thar warn't nairy ornery cuss on the mounting as dared to look at the groun' she walked on. I'm some, stranger, when I gits riled, an' the fellows 'lowed 'twas my deal, an' cl'ared the track. Well, sech was matters tell the twenty-seven day er las' August, whenst we was comin' home f'um meetin' down to the cove.

That day I axed an' Nancy spoke the word, and we fixed the time—this here very day, blame it—fur the knot to be tied, the knot which binds but don't ineberate." I saw the fellow's jaw was beginning to quiver, and suddenly he clapped his hands to his face and dropped back on the stone. I thought he was going off into one of those staring trances, perhaps, or worse, so I interposed gently :

"Where was the hitch?"

"Right here, durn it all," he shouted, slapping his narrow pantaloons and flinging open his ample coat front. "These here clo'es, I tell you. Mam made em fur me with her own han's, too; that's whar it hurts. I can't go back to the cabin an' tell Mam Nancy scorned the clo'es she made, could you, now, stranger, 't you was me? I've knowed Mam longer'n I hev Nancy, an' she hev stood by me th'ough evil as well as th'ough good report, in sickness an' in health"—the fellow's eyes were getting set again. "Oh Lordy! Whateher reckon make my ol' fool min' keep runnin' on that marridge cer'mony? As I aimed to tell you while ago, Mam, she made this here suit out'n-out, cardin' an' spinnin' an' weavin' an' cuttin' an' sewin' and all. She ripped up Pap's weddin' suit fur a patron, which Gran'-pap he'd mar'id in the same befo' him. An' this hickory stripe shirt, she made it, too, an' stranger, what's a fellow to do? I can't go home, s' help me Gawd, an' tell the ol' 'oman Nancy scorned the clo'es she made fer me, but I don't min' tellin' you, seein' you are handy, an' seem kinder soft an' harmless. As I 'lowed the weddin' was to come off to-night, so I got ready an'

went down early, aimin' to be on han', an' thinkin' I could he'p 'roun' mebbe, fetchin' wood an' drawin' cider. I got thar soon arter dinner, an' Nancy's little sis Ten, she seed me comin', and runned an' tol' the yuthers. An' by gum, whenst I shinned over the fence, an' started up the parth to the house, thar they all was, big as life, come to the door to watch me. Thar was Nancy an' her Mam an' her Dad an' Buck an' Jeems, an' Marthy Ann an' 'Randy Gibbs f'um over at Jasper, what had come to stan' up at the weddin', an' that little blame' Tennessee, an' Nancy! Lord, how they seem' to swell thar in the cabin door, as I fumbled up to the house th'ough the dead leaves. Seem' like thar was a plum army of 'em thar, an' Nancy, an' look like my legs tangled up same's a interferin' horse, an' my arms growed so long they tetched the groun' an' my feet so big the yearth couldn't hol' em. My, stranger, but I was hot whenst I did get to that cabin do', which it natchelly seemed to be miles away. Well, whenst I did get thar, thar was Nancy!"

"'Thomas McTair,' she said, pyeart-like, steppin' to the front, an' 'Randy Gibbs a-eggin' her on f'um behin'. 'Thomas McTair,' — Pap, his name is Thomas, an' Mam jined on the McTair fur the bishop what uster be down to Nashville — 'Thomas McTair,' says Nancy, 'was you aimin' to marry in them jeans garments?' she says. 'Them was my intentions,' says I, seein' she had spoke so proper. 'Well, Mr. Lane,' she up an' answer, 'if them is your intentions, you'll git some yuther gal to marry you. If a man is too low down to git a pa'r er sto'-bought clo'es to marry



in, why the Lord hev mercy on his soul, fur I won't. Yes, sir, them's what Nancy's very words war, an' with that the do' slammed, an' whenst I looked up thar warn't no Nancy! O Lord! O Lord!"

"Stranger," he began again after a moment, "did you mean them words you spoke about this dad-blamed suit er jeans? Did you now?"

"Well, yes," I answered. "From my standpoint that is a first-rate suit, straight goods, all wool and a yard wide."

"Thanky, stranger, thanky!" said Thomas Mc-Tair exuberantly, "blamed ef I don't tell the old lady them words er your'n; but see here, stranger, would you min' swoppin'?"

"What? Suits?" I asked, smiling at the remembrance of the twelve inches of difference in our heights.

"That's what," he said eagerly. "You see, it's thiser way: Thar's plenty time yit, fo' the weddin' was to 'a been, an' ef you air a min' to 'commodate me I kin git thar by the time the 'squire'll come, an' bless Gawd, I'll git Nancy!"

"I am afraid your clothes won't fit me," I said, temporizingly.

His face fell. "Looker here, stranger," he said, and there were tears in his eyes. "I'mer losin' the chance er Nancy! You don't know what that means, ca'se you've never sot eyes on that purty face er hern, nur seen her walkin' in the mist uv a mornin' with the dampness curlin that yeller hair uv hern, an'—O Lord, stranger, ain't thar a gal som'ers as you'd die to git?"



"Right you are there, Thomas," I said, dismounting. "You've hit the nail on the head, and I'll tell you what I'll do for you. Mam's cooked up a lot of good things, hasn't she, back at the cabin, for you and Nancy to start honey-mooning on?"

"That's what," he answered.

"Well, shuck off. I'll lend you my suit till the wedding's over, provided you'll put me on the trail to your cabin, and give me supper and a bed. A fellow gets kinder played climbing mountains."

"Stranger, you're a trump," cried Thomas with effusion. "You're a man, ever' inch of you, an' you're treatin' me white. O Lord! Jest to think, I'll git Nancy!"

"I say, Thomas," said I, after we had both disrobed, "you'll have to get that turkey grease out of your hair, or I'm afraid my hat won't stay on your head; it will slip off, you know."

"Right you air, stranger," he said, eyeing my rough shock, "mebbe a little stragglin' look, as you mought call it, would go better with sto'-bought clo'es. But come down this way a piece."

He picked up my bundle of clothes and his own big boots, which he had been compelled to remove in order to skin his trousers over his feet, and led the way down the trail, clad only in his under-suit of unwashed Sea-island.

We came presently upon a little cove under overhanging ledges of rock whence a spring bubbled, trailing its way noisily down the mountain-side. Before I knew what he was about Thomas McTair had thrown himself forward on the palms of his hands,

and was standing feet uppermost over the stream. The ripples gurgled through his long hair, washing the oil out upon the troubled waters.

"Never wet a thread, did I?" he said, by and by, as he turned a somersault, and landed on his feet.

By this time I was comfortably habited in his hickory shirt and brown jeans, with about a foot of trousers turned up in an English roll around my ankles.

Thomas McTair's dressing proceeded more slowly, converting him into a forked sight. My trousers struck him about the region of his calves, and refused to be coaxed any lower, but this was a minor defect as his cow-hide boot-tops nobly satisfied the deficiency. But up above there were no extenuating circumstances. The button-tab at the end of the shirt-bosom struck him amid seas, and lopped over the low-cut vest. The short sack coat failed to hide the strap and buckle in the rear, and showed a suspicious line of white round the waist places when he raised his arm. About three inches of Sea-island under-shirt formed a cuff protruding beneath the coat sleeve. His wet hair stood out in little weepy wisps all over his head, but the biggest thing in sight was the smile that pervaded his countenance.

"Don't happen to hev a lookin'-glass about you, do you, stranger?" he asked, when his toilet was complete.

"I do just," I said, reaching in my saddle-bags for my traveling case, and the glow of satisfaction that showed in his face at sight of his comical reflection rewarded me for my philanthropic endeavors.

"Stranger," he said to me by and by, as he held my hand in his, "you hev been to me a frien' in need with two in the bush, that's what. Now s'long tell I see you agin. You foller the leadin' er that thar trail th'ough the underbresh, an' fust news you know you'll see the cabin in the cla'rin', an' mo'n likely Mam er milkin' the cow. She's survigroun lookin' Mam is, but she's all right. You jest tell her Thomas McTair sont you, an' your fort'in's made with Mam. The jug sets behin' the do'. S'long: I'm loaded now fur Nancy."

I watched him swing himself down with quick, free strides, and by and by turned my horse's head up through the underbrush.

The sun was just sinking to rest, and hung like a red ball of fire beyond the murky mountains. I turned for a last long look at him to find myself staring straight down the barrel of a rifle.

"Didn't calklate on this jest, did ye stranger?" asked the old man at the end of the gun as he came out from the underbrush. He was a long, lean, lank, tough old customer with determination written in box-car letters all over his hard old face, and I began to feel a little shaky in my bones with that hungry-looking rifle filling up the space between us.

"Well, I believe you are right, old man," I began, circulating through all the grey matter of my brain to produce an appropriate answer.

"I 'lowed not, ye dadblasted valley-man ye," the old man interrupted me. "I could give ye the same as ye sont mebbe, with ol' meat-in-the-pot here, but shootin's too good fur ye. I guess ye'll keep handy

enough, so ye'll 'commodate me by leadin' the way up that there trail whilst me an' ol' meat-in-the-pot brings upm the rear."

"No use talking over matters before we get up, is there, old fellow?" I asked, breathing easier at the chance of a respite at least, and finding that the trail was the one pointed out by Thomas McTair. I put two and two together and concluded that my captor was the father of my whilom friend, and that perhaps matters might not prove as disastrous as they looked.

A half hour's steady pull brought us to the clearing which Thomas McTair had described, and sure enough, Mam was at the pen milking. The old man directed my way up to the rickety rail fence, and called his wife to him, speaking to her in husky whispers which I could not understand.

By and by he made me dismount and lead the way into the cabin. "Onload, stranger," he said, motioning me to a seat in the chimney corner by the fire. I gave him my pistol and empty flask, which were all I had transferred from my pockets to Thomas McTair's when we changed clothes. Through the open window I saw the old woman leading away my tired nag, and I hoped she would give him a good supper. Presently she came in.

"Bets," said the old man, giving her the rifle, "ye set thar by the table, an' keep the gun p'inted plum. Ef the skunk wink his eye onnecessary, why let her go Gallagher. I'd like to keep him tell the boys kin see the fun, but blaze away ef he shows his teeth. I'll g'long down now."

Bets was a "survigrouis" old woman, as Thomas

McTair had said, and she gazed at me with fire in her eye, and her finger on the trigger. I calculated upon the chance of Thomas McTair's probable return to the parental roof, and concluded that for the sake of my health and the welfare of humanity at large, it would be unwise to put off eating and drinking till that time. I looked the old lady straight in her fiery eye, and said with the deliberation of a seed-tick grabbing for keeps, and in the sanctimonious tone of a newly-appointed circuit-rider:

"Madam, if I should by chance die of starvation before my friend Thomas McTair returns from the wedding, kindly tell him that it broke my heart to go without seeing him once more in this life, and that I shall hope to meet him in heaven." The old woman's hand shook, and I feared the trigger would fall, but it didn't, and I kept on. "Tell my friend, Thomas McTair, that I will and bequeath to him and his heirs forever my plug horse, my saddle-bags, and all that is in them, my six-shooter and my empty flask, and this I do in return for the favor he showed me in so nobly exchanging this excellent and altogether lovely suit of brown Jeans for my own garments which moth and dust doth corrupt, and thieves break thro' and steal. Amen."

By this time the old woman was in tears. She laid the gun on the table, grabbed a pumpkin pie from the shelf behind her with one hand, and about a yard of fried smoked sausage links with the other.

"Stranger," she said, shaking a tear about the size of a marrowfat pea from the end of her thin nose, "stranger, set to."

She laid a plate upon the table as she spoke, flanked it with a bowl of apple sauce, a corn-pone, and about two dozen hard-boiled eggs. "The cabin's your'n, stranger," she said, as I drew my chair to the board.

"And the jug behind the door?" I enquired.

"An' the jug behin' the door," she said, producing a fat, brown demijohn, and a cracked glass.

By and by she took the gun and set it over in the corner with a thump. "Oh! Tom Lane allus was a born'd fool," she said, emphatically, as she fished her snuff-box and brush from her pocket, and sat down to ruminate.

I had about cleared up everything in sight, and was feeling wonderfully comfortable inside, when I heard a yell like a stray Comanche's and old Lane burst in upon us.

"Thang Gawd!" he said, grabbing my hand and almost crushing it in his own. "Thang Gawd ye air live an' kiekin'. Blamed ef I didn't think ye'd kill my son, Thomas McTair, fur the clothes on his back, blarst my ol' fool hide."

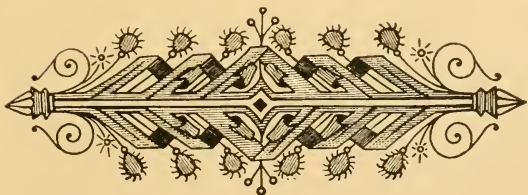
Thomas McTair and Nancy came in soon after.

"By gum, stranger," said the big fellow, "but you missed a close call f'um the old man's gun, didn't you. But it's all right now. You're safe, and I've got Nancy."

I staid with them till the sun was high in the heavens next day, and Thomas McTair went down the trail with me a bit to put me in the right road.

"You've been a Gawd-sen' to me, stranger," he said, at parting, "fur you got me Nancy."

The distant tree-tops blazed in the glory of the noon-day sun as I turned into the rocky mountain road; the grey squirrels warmed themselves amid the branches overhead, rattling down chestnut-hulls upon the fallen leaves, and away back in the underbrush I heard the high pitched, happy voice of Thomas Mc-Tair: "O git along, git along, git along Nancy, way down in Rockingham."





## AN UNBROKEN BOND.

IT was St. Valentine's eve, and at midnight I had just returned, wet and cold, from visiting a patient way out in the Thirteenth District. As I hung my dripping coat in the outer closet I stumbled over a box, which, I remembered, the office boy told me had come by express during the morning. It was a small wooden case and quite light, so I carried it upstairs with me and set it down on the hearth. I put on my slippers and dressing-gown, got down my cigars and was just seating myself to have a good rest, when something familiar in the writing on the box at my feet struck my attention.

"Why, it is Murcherson's fist," I said. "What can he be sending me?"

Drawing out the nails, I opened the box hastily, finding it, as I thought, filled with the most beautiful cigars, long, slim, black Havanas, every one. "Murcherson's a trump," I said, taking up a handful of the beauties. As I did so my hand struck something hard underneath. Removing the cigars hastily I found that they covered a man's skull, of the most exquisite shape and polish, being rich and creamy as



old ivory. I took it out of the box and examined it closely, marveling much at its matchless beauty and symmetry. By and by I put it up on the mantel in front of me, between the clock and a little brass casket, wherein I kept a few little worthless souvenirs. As I resumed my seat it seemed to me that the eye-sockets in the skull had gathered expression, and that its grinning mouth was ready to speak.

I am a plain, practical man, not given to fantasies, but I could not shake off the hideous fascination which the vacant countenance had for me. I opened book after book, only to turn over the leaves unread. The skull kept glaring at me. I lit my cigar and tried to doze, but my eyes refused to close. I got up by and by and turned the skull with its face to the wall, but then it seemed to me that the thing was leering at me over an imaginary shoulder. It was horrible. I turned out the gas and sat in the semi-darkness, the firelight flickering and throwing long shadows across the room.

By and by I heard the clock strike one.

"It is St. Valentine's Day," I said, throwing some fresh coal into the grate. St. Valentine's Day! What did that mean to me? It had meant a great deal to me once, and now that I was, with grey hairs beginning to show at my temples, it seemed to me that I looked more and more eagerly for its coming, grew more and more anxious for the word that was to come to me on St. Valentine's Day—the word that was to make me so happy.

I had been but nineteen when I first knew Christine, and she was just budding into the flower of per-

fect womanhood. I knew I loved her from the first, and fancied I could not err in believing that she returned my love as frankly as it was given. Years passed—two, three—yet I did not speak; there seemed no use. It was but natural that we should love, and I had no fear of the future. It was my last year at college, and I wanted to wait and show her that it was a man's love that I had to give her.

It was during this year, at mid-term, that Maurice Beaumont came. When I think of him it always seems that what followed his coming came but naturally. He was one of those reckless, fascinating, brilliant men who know no law but their own will. Personally, he was the most beautiful man I ever beheld. Tall, lithe, graceful, he possessed that sensuous languor of bearing which so often conceals a fiery intensity of temperament. His brow was broad and expansive and smooth as polished marble; his eyes—were they black or blue? I never knew, but I have seen them flash forth iridescent rays of purple that gleamed like fire. His chin was deeply cleft, his lips were full and mobile and smooth as a woman's.

It was I who introduced this man to Christine. It was upon St. Valentine's Day, and I shall never forget the meeting. When she came into us as we sat awaiting her in the firelit room, Maurice arose as I called her name, and, without speaking, he held out his hand to her, looking at her with his eyes half veiled under his long lashes. And she? I was standing near her and saw her whole slight frame shudder as with a sudden chill, but her cheeks were burning red when she put her hand in his. During

the months that followed I strove to blind myself to what was happening before my very eyes. I had nothing to offer but my love, and when school was over I went to tell her. I am sure she must have known I should tell her, but I shall never forget the look of anguish that came upon her face as I poured out my love to her.

"Oh, Henry," she cried, bending toward me and clasping her hands, "do not, I beseech you, do not say any more."

"But I love you, Christine," I said.

"If you love me, have pity on me and say no more," she answered. "I cannot, I must not love you. Be my friend, Henry, and help me."

Her manner alarmed me. "What is it, Christine?" I cried. "You have but to tell me what you wish."

"There is only one way—do not speak—go away. It must be. I may not, I must not listen. I must not love you."

Ere the words had died upon her lips, Maurice Beaumont had come into the room and stood between us, his eyes flashing fire. His voice was more than calm as he spoke.

"Who speaks of love to thee, ma belle?" he said, as he took Christine's hand in his. I could almost have killed him when he stooped and kissed her. Without a word she sank back, flushed but passive. I turned and fled from the house, and I think neither knew that I was gone.

Two years passed before I ever saw either again. I was returning from the dissecting room one night,

when I felt an arm slipped into mine and heard a familiar voice greeting me. It was Beaumont. Bitter as I felt toward him, I could not shake off his grasp, could not resist the fascination which he had always exerted over me. He went with me to my room and ensconced himself in my best arm-chair. We talked of anything, everything but Christine. I dared not ask him of her, and I knew nothing save that they were not married.

"What day is this?" he asked at last.

"Tuesday," I answered.

"And the day after to-morrow is St. Valentine's Day," he said. "Do you remember St. Valentine's Day two years ago, Henry?"

Without waiting for me to reply he pulled out his watch, exclaiming: "Just two o'clock. Come, hustle into a fresh rig. We shall have time to catch the south-bound train, and on Valentine's Day we shall be with Christine. What do you say? Come."

It was a very strange meeting, that with Christine. I could not help feeling that she was glad of my coming, though she gave me scarce a word more than the greeting. Brilliant as I knew Beaumont to be, I had never seen him as he was that night. He was gay, witty, sparkling; he was grave, calm, tender, passionate, intense, as the mood suited him, but always fascinating. By and by he sat down to the open piano and let his fingers fly over the keys till they seemed possessed of the very demon of music, weird and fantastic. Suddenly, while still the spell of his playing was on us, he came and stood before us.

"I am going away," he said. "I shall never trouble you again, if you will only wait patiently. I know not where I shall go, nor when I shall return, but it will be on St. Valentine's Day. Wait, and expect me."

Stooping over he pressed his lips to Christine's brow, then, tossing into my lap a long, slender cigar, such as he always smoked, he grasped my hand and was gone.

Ten years passed slowly for us, and still there came no word of Beaumont. It had been needless for me to urge Christine to become my wife.

"I am bound to him by a sacred promise, Henry," she said, "and I love you too well to have you suffer. We must await his coming. You do not know his power."

I was thinking of all these things that night while the skull kept leering at me from the mantel. The fire had burned low in the grate as I mused, and it had grown quite dark in the room. Sinking back into the chair, I closed my eyes. Did I sleep? I know not what time passed, but suddenly I heard the sharp stroke of a match, a faint light gleamed and faded, and opening my eyes I saw that the skull had turned its face to me, and between its grinning rows of teeth was a cigar, a long, black Havana.

"How are you, Henry, old boy?" Could I be asleep and dreaming, or was it really Beaumont's voice coming to me from the skull? I was too startled to speak, and the voice went on:

"I tried to come back sooner, but I was afraid. She would have married me, and it had been better

for her to die than to be tied to such a reprobate as I. Do not reproach me for keeping you waiting so long; I was afraid to come while I was alive. I loved her so; my God, how I loved her! But, adieu forever. Morning will soon be here—the morning of St. Valentine's Day! May it bring joy to you and her? I didn't mean you to keep this weed for me, but I have enjoyed it. Thanks. Good-by."

I shook myself up with a start. Had I been asleep? The room was dark with the blackness that harbingers the coming day. The fire was nearly out, my limbs were numb with cold. Hastily lighting the gas, I looked about me. The skull sat upon the mantel, its vacant sockets staring, its mouth grinning. The teeth on one side were slightly discolored as from tobacco, and on the shelf beside lay a little heap of ashes and a cigar stump!

Unlocking the casket with the key, which always hung to my watch chain, I searched for the cigar which Beaumont had given me the last night I had seen him. It was gone!

As I closed the casket hastily, my elbow brushed against the skull, knocking it over upon the hearth below. A little bit of paper fell from within it, dislodged by the jar. Picking it up eagerly, I read:

"Dear Doc:—I found this queer skull in a curio shop in Havana. The old fellow who kept the shop was hard up at the time, else he would never have parted with it. He told me it was the skull of a queer chap named Beaumont, who used to frequent his shop and smoke his best cigars. Beaumont died a year or

so ago, and left a request that my old curio dealer should preserve his skull, himself giving directions how it should be prepared. It struck me as being somewhat out of the common order, so I send it to you as a Valentine, along with these weeds.

“Yours,                   TOM MURCHERSON.”

I passed my hand before my eyes. I was not dreaming now, at any rate. Between the curtains the faintest streak of gray was showing. The day was breaking—St. Valentine's Day.





## A BELATED SPRING TIME.

IT was a bitterly cold morning, and the blue-coated policeman who had been walking slowly up and down the block for half an hour without ceasing, beat his hands together and snuggled his bearded face down into his upturned collar. He looked up and down the avenue anxiously now and then, as if hoping to see some one, but at last paused before a little white-washed cabin. He waited still irresolute, scanning closely the long broad street, but apparently in vain, for in another moment he had stepped up to the cabin door and opened it without knocking.

"Happy New Year to you, Uncle Isham," he said cheerily, putting his head in, and smiling pleasantly at the old negro who sat before the fire with a big well-filled platter on the table beside him and a tin cup of steaming coffee in his hand.

"'Fo' Gawd, Marse Billy, honey, ef you ain't skeered the goose flesh out on me," said the old man, struggling to his feet, and spilling the coffee, which ran in a little trickling stream down his ragged trousers. "Fust time I seed you dis year sar, an' here tis de secon' day too," he went on, laughing at his



own pleasantry. "But come in out'n de col', chile, an' set down 'fo de fire and warm youse'f. An' de same to you, sar, allus an' whatsomever."

"Thanky, Uncle Isham, thanky," and the officer drew a chair up to the glowing fire that crackled and flared on the wide hearth.

"How's the rheumatiz," he asked, stretching his hands out to the warmth, and looking up to the old man over his shoulder.

"Poly, Marse Billy," answered the old man, "poly, thank Gawd. How's youse'f, sar."

"First rate, thanks, old man, but it's cold as charity out there."

"Hello'. What's all this?" said the officer, breaking off and stooping down to examine a pair of turkey wings and a big outspread tail which lay stretched and drying amid the ashes on the hearth.

"Dem dar, sar," asked the old man shyly, "dem dar's turkey fans, Marse Billy."

"Fans, eh?" said the officer rising to his feet, and facing about sharply, with his back to the fire, "and what's that in that dish over there? T for turkey bones? Why, man, you must have been having a spread. Why didn't you give me an invite for old times' sake? Haven't been getting married now, have you, old man, without me to give the bride away?"

"Sho now, Marse Billy," said Isham with a burst of laughter, "who you reckon gwin't marry a no count old fellow lack me?"

"Who? Why that's just what I want to know. Aunt Em'ly, on the other side the fence maybe, ain't it?" asked Billy.

"You go off now, Marse Billy, chile," said the old man, laughing with infinite delight, and shuffling from one foot to the other nervously. "She wouldn't have seeh as me nohow."

"Don't know about that so much," the officer went on pleasantly, "but—where did you say you got your turkey?"

The old man shuffled to the fire-place in an embarrassed kind of way, and put on a stick of wood. "It was gin to me, sar."

"It was eh? Well, that's lucky. And who gin it to you?" the officer turned back his coat tails, ran his hands down deep into his pockets, and grinned facetiously.

"A lady, sar."

"A lady, Uncle Isham? Why, this grows interesting. Wish I could find a lady kind enough to 'gin' me a turkey now and then for a change. A lady? Well, what does that mean? Think you could make enough for two of your size, old man? How's business anyhow?"

"Purty fair, sar, purty fair. Ain't got no cause to complain."

"That's good," said Billy, in an absent-minded, temporizing kind of way. "Cold weather brought you plenty of wood-sawing, I reckon. By the by, you weren't in day before yesterday; at work then?"

"Yessar, I's out to Col. Gilmers, sar, choppin' stove wood," the old man answered.

"On Jordan Street?"

"Yessar."

"Next door to Sam Wilson's?"

"Yessar, Marse Billy," said the old man, hanging his head a little shamefacedly, it seemed; "how come you ax me dat, sar?"

The officer's eyes dropped too as the old man spoke. He opened his watch, and shut it again with a sharp snap. He buttoned up his long coat, and pulled on his wool gloves with a brisk, business-like air. "Well, you'll have to come along with me, I reckon, old man," he said at last, looking fiercely down at his boots and shutting his lips firmly.

"What you say, Marse Billy?" the old man asked.

"I reckon you'll have to come along with me—to court, you know," the officer answered slowly, looking pitifully at the old man, and rubbing his gloved hands nervously together.

"You see how it is, old man," he said; "Sam Wilson had a turkey taken from his coop night before last, a big, fine gobbler, with bronze markings—" he stooped down and picked up one of the wings from the hearth, examining it critically—"and—I think we had better go now, old man, it is nearly nine o'clock."

The old man sank down into his chair covering his face with his hands. He uttered no word, but gave a low sob, like a helpless child.

The young man looked down at him sadly. He was not much to look at to be sure, this poor, broken old man, with whom the passing years had not dealt gently. There was only a fringe of wool now encircling his head like a disjointed nimbus, in the midst of which his bald pate shone like burnished bronze.

Age and rheumatism, and bending over the saw-buck, perhaps, had crooked forever the bowed back, and stiffened the trembling limbs, and the poor old eyes from which the tears trickled slowly now, beneath the knotted fingers, were always red and watery from many years of whitewashing.

Sure he was not much to look upon even at his best, but the young man who stood beside him gazed down at him fondly, passing his palm hurriedly before his eyes now and then. He could not remember when Isham had not been to him a dear, loved, familiar sight, this poor old wood-cutter, whom all Shreveport knew and loved. He remembered with a vividness that smote him in the face, blinding him almost to his duty, more than one dreary night, when he, a ragged barefoot lad, hungry and cold, and worse than homeless, had found shelter and warmth in the old man's cabin, and food at his humble board. Was it so very long since he had sat in that very chimney corner listening to the marvelous adventures of "Brer Rabbit" and the old man's far distant youth?

Oh, Lord, this wouldn't do! He fancied he heard the clock on the stroke while he lingered with his duty clear before him. He choked back the tears that filled his big-bearded throat, and stooping over, rested his hand on the old man's head.

"Maybe it'll all come right, Uncle Isham," he said gently, "but I think I shall have to go now."

The old man stood up dazed and helpless. The officer put his stick in his trembling hand, and reached his ragged old hat from its peg above the fire-place.

He banked the ashes over the glowing coals, and led the old man out, locking the door behind him.

"You just come on behind me, Uncle Isham," he said with kindly delicacy, and with bowed head he walked down the street slowly, in spite of his haste, that the poor shuffling old feet following him might not suffer.

The little court-room over the market-house was crowded with culprits, poor pleasure-loving creatures who had come to reap the harvest of their holiday wild oats.

The docket was almost completed when they got there, and Billy gave the old man a seat in the corner by the stove. He sat with bowed head, silent and listless, even when his own name was called.

"Stand up, Uncle Isham," said Billy, touching him on the shoulder.

"Why, is it you, old man?" asked the mayor, looking kindly over his glasses.

The abject head only bowed lower, but the old man did not speak. He stood leaning on his stick, nervous and pitiful.

The mayor asked the old man no questions. Instead he and Billy held a long consultation together, speaking in husky whispers which the old man seemed not to hear. At the end of it Billy ran his hand down into his pocket, and began to unstrap a thin leather wallet which he pulled out.

But the mayor was clinking together a couple of coins which he held in his hand, and he leaned over his desk to the old man and said, "I reckon two dollars will compensate Mr. Wilson for the loss of his

gobbler, and another two to the city will make it even, if Billy will let me go halves with him for that amount and—and—I think you may go now, old man, for I am sure I will never see you here again.”

The old man lifted his head as if to speak, but his trembling lips were silent, and he did not move.

“Come, Uncle Isham,” said Billy, taking him by the arm.

“Beg pardon, your honor,” said a thin-faced, one-eyed constable, rising from his seat by the door, and taking a paper from his inner pocket, “I’ve a warrant sworn out before Justice Hanks for the arrest of this old negro on the charge of larceny; I shall have to relieve you of him, friend Billy.”

“Confound that fellow Wilson,” said Billy between his teeth, when he and the mayor were left alone. “Why couldn’t he be satisfied with the worth of his turkey. If I had known all this I shouldn’t have—”

“Wilson is a new man to the town, Billy, and you must remember, he doesn’t know old Isham as we do,” interrupted the mayor.

“Have you anything to offer in defense,” asked young Hanks quite kindly when the old man’s case was presented. The old fellow shook his head.

“Shall I appoint counsel?”

“Tain’t wuth while, sar,” the old man answered. “Jess lemme know what you want when the gent’man gits thew.”

Mr. Wilson was on hand in person to offer testimony, which he did very clearly. The evidence was dead against the old man. On the last day of the old year he had been engaged in chopping wood for Col.

Gilmer, Mr. Wilson's next-door neighbor. More than once during the day he had been seen in Mr. Wilson's own back yard, talking with his cook.

"How about your cook, Mr. Wilson," said Hanks interrupting him, "do you know her?"

"O, yes, she's been with me all the year. She's straight. Old Emily, you know."

"O, Aunt Em'ly," said Hanks, reassured.

The old man moved a step nearer the young judge, lifting for a moment his downcast eyes. His hat fell from his trembling fingers, he stooped to pick it up, and the evidence proceeded.

From time to time during the year the old man had been a visitor to Mr. Wilson's kitchen, and also from time to time small quantities of wood had been missing from the wood-pile. However, this was merely in passing: no charge was to be preferred for the wood-stealing. That was only a suspicion. But upon New Year's day, having rather more serious doubts concerning the turkey, Mr. Wilson had stopped at the old man's cabin on his way down town, ostensibly to make arrangements for a job of white-washing, and had then seen drying on the hearth the wings and tail of what had once been his own bronze gobbler.

"I am sorry, old man," said Hanks when the case was dismissed, "but three months was as little as I could give you."

They led him away after a while to the jail behind the court-house, and the old man sat down desolately on a bench against the wall, in the common cell with his fellow-prisoners.



They were a kindly crew enough, these jolly jail-birds whom he found himself among when at last the door was closed upon them, and they soon came to let him alone as he wished them to do. All day long he would sit in his corner unheeding them, and at night when they were asleep he would lie awake, thinking, thinking.

Sometimes Billy came to see him, bringing a plug of tobacco to keep him company, or a little fine-cut for the old man's pipe. But these little kindnesses seemed to make little impression upon him; he only sat just the same when Billy was gone, thinking, thinking.

There was a long stretch of years back of this, the old man's evil hour, which might have unburdened themselves for him, but somehow, now he thought but dimly of them, even the days of his far distant youth, whose tender memories rise to the top like rich cream when the milk of life has soured. He had loved to linger upon them, those far away days when life was young, but now the old man's retrospect extended no further back than the throbbing time of last year's spring.

Yes, it must have begun in the spring-time, that belated budding of love's hope in the old man's bosom, which had commenced in his delight and ended in his undoing—the early spring-time, when the peach blossoms were gay against the wall of Mrs. Citron's shop, and even poor dirty Mugginsville was beautiful with the glory of returning life. Yes, it began in the spring, and the old man remembered that the May-pop vine which grew and sprawled



against the dividing fence 'twixt his own small yard and Em'ly's was then only a young thing whose delicate tendrils he had to lift out of the way of his whitewash brush. That May-pop vine was like himself, the old man had told Em'ly once, with its roots on his side the fence, and its "hankerings" on hers. And these same "hankerings" of his, alas, what had they cost him, poor old man!

He had felt their first thrill, perhaps, when he sat on his little front gallery that early spring morning and watched Em'ly moving into the cabin so close to his own that they seemed a tiny pair of twins, set down to play in the midst of the dust and dirt of the straggling street. Somehow it had touched a tender chord in the old man's heart to see a comely woman briskening about with a broom in that comfortable, definite way which only women know. It reminded him of what he had once hoped for of the wife of his dead and gone youth. But she had been long ago dead and gone then, too, the wife of his youth, and when death came to claim her for his own, all that he found was a scant shroud-ful of skin and bones. Em'ly now as he had gazed upon her, proved a fine, fat, comely woman whose voluminous turbaned head crowned a face ample as a harvest moon's, with her overflowing sides running quite over the belt line and resting upon the spreading hips below, with that generous prodigality which a bounteous nature likes sometimes to show.

As the old man looked back upon it now his chance of ever convincing Em'ly that one little cabin would be big enough for the two of them, must have

been a hopeless one from the start, handicapped as he was by age and infirmity, and yet, how tenaciously had he clung to it! And was this to be the end?

Often and often thro' the long night watches he fancied he heard the turn of Em'ly's key in the door and her step on the unsteady cabin floor as he had heard them many a time during his year's worship of her. Sometimes too he heard the dreary dribble of water, and remembered the two leaking faucets in the rickety tub cistern which split in twain the dividing fence, and stretched a wooden gutter, like a thin brown shaky arm to each of the two conjoined cabins. How tenderly his thoughts had dwelt once upon this existent bond of union between his own home and Em'ly's, but what did it profit him now that when the long hot summer days piled the dust high on the housetops, and no rain fell in all the dirty little city, what did it profit him that he had gone thirsty so that the faucet on the other side of the fence might not be empty? And then those long first fall days when the early nipping cold had kindled into brighter flame the smouldering fire on his wide hearth and sent a thin wisp of smoke curling from Em'ly's round-mouthed chimney—he remembered these too. He remembered something else too that smote him thro' the long days and nights of thinking; for in all Em'ly's little grass-grown yard never a stick of wood was to be seen, tho' the smoke from her chimney waned not, and her commodious basket which went with her empty in the mornings returned always laden at even-tide after her day's cooking. Poor old man, poor old man!

Was he dreaming, or did he hear Em'ly calling to

him as she had called to him that New Year's eve? "Isham, Isham!" He turned his head over on his cot to shut out the ghost of a sound which haunted him. He had been glad enough to hear it once, however, and to see her too, that night, standing by the little fence with the street light shining on her face and a big brown bundle in her arms.

"Want to ax you to do me a favor," she had said, and by and by she had handed up to him not a parcel, but a big, fat, fluttering turkey.

"Miss Lou gin it to me," she had said, "Miss Lou Wilson, whar I cook at, an' bein' I's gwine to have comp'ny tomorrer I lowed I'd ax you to kill him and elen him fur me, an' arter he's cooked an' served I'll pass you over de bones an' j'int's fur to 'commodate vouse'f wid."

He kept hearing her voice saying the words over and over again. Surely none heard but himself, as he lay there alone in the dark? Over and over again, over and over again; but dusky wings fanned the old man's cheeks, and by and by he slept.

"Isham, old man!" He was not dreaming this time to be sure, and he opened his eyes to see the pale daylight creeping thro' the little grated window, and Billy, big and kindly, leaning over him.

"It's all right now, old man," he said. "Your time is up, and I have come to ask your forgiveness for my part in that performance three months ago. I ought to have known better then, but she—I understand now."

The old man scarcely heard, but the sheriff's key grated in the lock once more—and this was freedom!

The strong light in the corridor blinded him, but he thought some one was coming toward him. The old man stood aside to let her pass, but she came quite up to him, took his hand in hers, and called him by name. It was Em'ly.

"I done come fur you, Isham, honey," she said.

The three months of repentance had softened her voice, and her woman's heart too, let us suppose, for there was a wedding in the neat little cabin on her side of the fence that night. Justice Hanks performed the ceremony, and Billy gave the bride away, and carved the big turkey which he had himself provided for the bountiful board.

"You must take better care of the old man, now that you have got him on your side of the fence, Aunt Em'ly," said young Hanks, when he told her good-night.

She looked reproachfully at him as she took the old man's crooked bony hand in her round plump one. "Don't you, honey, don't you," she said with tears in her eyes, "don't you pesticate de ol' man now—my ol' man whose shoe-latches you an' me is not wuthy to onloose."

"Amen," said Billy from the doorway, and the two were left alone in the dawning of another spring.



## AT THE STATION.

THE lowering clouds had begun to empty themselves with a dreary drizzle by the time the little dirty train reached Temple, and when Anna got out she was almost glad of the dampness in her face. Both the conductor and the porter were busy with the numerous parcels of a party of young girls whose gay chatter had made them quite conspicuous during the journey, so Anna had to make two trips to the waiting-room before she got her own baggage off. She put her telescope down in a vacant seat in the corner by a window, while she went back for her bag and lunch-box. She ran a little nervously across the platform, dragging her umbrella under her arm, and having a vague dread that she would not find her telescope when she returned. It had not been moved, however, and she put it down on the floor and sank down into the vacant seat dejectedly.

The journey had not been a pleasant one. It had seemed to Anna that the dead level of the Texas plains depressed her. The sky touched the earth at too close an horizon to-day, the dull grey above melting into the dull grey below, leaving no vistas.

The clumps of mesquite and scrub oak lost their green in the general dullness; the sheep in the pastures huddled together, cold and shivering. The whole aspect was gloomy. The chill of the east wind crept into the badly-warmed and illy-ventilated coach, and it had been in vain for Anna to button her well-worn cloak up close about her throat: her feet and limbs were cold, though her face was feverishly hot.

The whole thing had set her head to aching, and she pressed it against the soiled pane now, looking out across the wet plains hopelessly. Now and then the door of the waiting room opened as a newcomer entered, and the sharp gusts of wind that came in from the drear outside made her shiver. Within, in one corner of the spacious room, two boys were dealing out plug tobacco, ham sandwiches and coffee at an oil-cloth-covered lunch-counter. Poor, ill-fed women with dirty children and crying babies huddled about the stove, making frequent trips to the leaky water-tank with its rusty tin cup. Cow-boys with high-heeled boots and clinking spurs, walked restlessly about the room or stood and steamed their damp clothes before the fire. A Mexican *tamale* vender who occupied the seat next Anna's, sat dozing with his arms folded over his smoking basket. The commingled odor of the damp shucks, greasy meat and steamed meal was sickening, but the girl felt almost too tired to move, and there seemed small chance of her getting another seat. A thin-chested, watery-eyed youth, with a soiled bandage covering half of his cankered mouth, was cracking pecans between his knuckles and flipping the hulls into the

saw-dust-box cuspidor across the aisle. Anna felt a twinge of pain every time a nut cracked, and now and then unconsciously pressed her fingers nervously against her throbbing temples. Outside the cars were switching back and forth, clanking and whistling, and the porters were tossing and tumbling trunks noisily on the soggy platform.

Life seemed to Anna utterly and altogether desolate, and she closed her eyes by and by to shut out the hideous, sordid details of it just around her. There are moments rare enough to most of us, thank God, when we seem to lose the connecting link which binds us in the chain of pulsing, breathing humanity, and leave us stranded upon an island whence we may see only the intricate mechanism of life's hideous reality. Such a moment had come to Anna Kinloch, and when her closed lids turned her gaze inward, the tears trickled beneath her thin lids helplessly. It seemed to her that though her life had been one succession of battles, she had never known many victories, and all of them had left her some dead to bury; but it did not make her defeat any easier now to reflect that it was far from being the only one she had ever experienced. It did not help her to know that there had been extenuating circumstances in her favor. She had only taken the school on a venture, and the odds had been against her from the start. She had been too quiet, too reserved, too cultured, in fact, for the poor hard-featured narrow-minded settlers whose children she had tried to teach in the little bare Texas town that made scarce a blot on the spreading prairie. The children who had been brave enough to come to



school to her, sat and stared at her over their desks, their eyes big with fear and wonder: the women, poor, hard-worked, weary things, came to their doors to look after her as she passed, and the men stopped their teams and forgot to lift their hats when they saw her wandering alone about the prairies with her flower-press or her stone hammer in her hand. It only made the memory of all this harder now to reflect that she might have met the children's awe-struck, helpless gaze half-way and satisfied it: that she could have gone to the little bare houses sometimes and sat with the tired women and held their babies maybe, and talked with them about their work, which was all they knew, poor things: that she might have spoken a word or two now and then to the men, to show them she was neither dazed nor daft. These were the things she might have done and had not. Instead, she found herself driven more and more upon herself, and when mid-term came, the burden had grown too great, and she had shifted it. She had told the few children who were left staring at her, that they might pack up their books and go home, and the poor things had been too scared to ask why. There was nothing else to do but to lock up the schoolhouse and give the key to the old blacksmith next door, from whom she had obtained it in September.

"This here place ain't fittin' fur you, Miss," he had said to her that first day, and he only repeated it with a little look of pity, when she told him good-by. He was the nearest approach to a friend she had made during her stay.

Old Mrs. Gaddy, with whom she boarded, had shut her lips close when Anna told her she was going away. The five dollars which the girl paid her weekly was almost all that lay between the old woman and starvation, but deep down in her heart the poor thing felt a sense of relief.

"Miss Kinloch's ways ain't our ways," she had told her neighbors when they came first to gossip with her at the back door about her boarder, and that was as much as she had ever learned of the quiet woman who occupied her best room and whom she seldom saw except at meals.

Anna thought of all this now, and though her defeat had not been very much of one, it pained her nevertheless. At thirty women begin to feel a little loosening of the tension, sometimes to lose faith in themselves, and Anna wondered if there were not as many mistakes behind her as there seemed to be dangers ahead. She looked back upon her years of struggle and called them wasted. She had striven to force her little stream of life into broader currents than it was made for, only to see its waters trickle and fall where the rocks were rough or the banks were steep. It was that comprehension of her impotence before that had sickened her and driven her to Texas for a brace up. But the current was too feeble to run over so broad a bed, and she had made no effort. Perhaps it did not matter, after all; she was alone in the world, and one failure could not count for much in the whole universe, she thought.

The tears still trickled down her cheeks, but she had ceased to start when the boy cracked his pecans

or when the door opened. The man with *tamales* got up and went out: a train had come in, and passengers were crowding off and on. The stools around the lunch-counter were filled with people, and the boys were busy filling plates and rattling cups. Anna opened her lunch-box listlessly, and was not surprised to find that Mrs. Gaddy had put up only enough for one meal.

"She owed me so much and no more," said the girl to herself, with a little hard smile.

She set the box down on top of her telescope and went over to the counter for a cup of coffee. When she held out her hand to receive it, a man on the stool just beside her gave an order. Anna turned sharply, facing him and letting the cup fall heavily upon the counter, whence it rolled noisily to the floor.

"Look what you're about, won't you?" said the boy sharply.

"Look what *you* are about, youngster," said the man, springing to his feet and leaning over the counter. The boy winced and picked up the cup sulkily.

"Can I assist you, madame?" the man continued, turning to Anna and lifting his hat.

"Don't you know me, Robert Deering?" she asked.

"Why, it's Anna—Anna Kinloch, still?" he said pleasantly, holding out his hand.

She felt with a sudden thrill what a big, strong hand it was that she put hers into, and was not surprised a moment later to find herself following Deering to a neat little cloth covered table by a window in the corner. He had the same masterful way to him

that she knew so well in the old days, and it pleased her now as much as it had displeased her then, so she sat down at his bidding and waited for him to serve her.

"It's nicer here," he said, pouring her a cup of coffee from the steaming pot which the boy brought at his direction.

"But you don't know how glad I am to see you, Miss Anna," he went on, filling his own cup and cutting a wedge from his sandwich; "it seems quite like old times, doesn't it? And I don't believe you've changed one bit."

"Neither have you," she said, looking at him steadily for a moment before she spoke.

"Oh, never mind me, please," he said, hastily, almost nervous under her steady gaze. "We shall not mention my grey hairs, for instance, and I shall promise not to reproach you for the part you played in their production. I'm too glad to see you for that, and I only wish—" he began, looking through the window toward the sleeper that stood on the track without.

"Oh, don't, Robert, please," she interrupted him eagerly.

The people at the lunch counter had begun to disperse, and the two had the waiting-room almost to themselves. "Don't reproach me: I cannot bear it. You do not know how I have suffered, you do not know how glad I am to see you. It seems like one more chance of life left to me. I love you—" her words were coming rapidly, and though he looked up sharply she did not stop. "I love you, Robert Deer-

ing, I love you. I loved you long ago, and I strove against it. I thought it was strength that made me: I know now it was weakness. I am stronger now, strong enough to tell you that I was not honest with you in those old days, that I was untrue to myself, and the falsehood has darkened all my life. I have been walking in the shadow."

She would have kept on, her grey eyes kindled, and her cheeks flushed, but Deering had risen to his feet. He thought, as he looked down into her upturned face, that she had never been so beautiful as she was then. He held his watch open in his palm, and without upon the platform the conductor hallooed, "All aboard!"

Anna heard the watch ticks like the thumping of great heart-beats. From between her tense lids she saw the grey hairs rise and fall on Deering's temples: she heard his quick breath stirring his mustache. From the window of the Pullman which was beginning slowly to move, a woman in a grey suit poked out her shapely head crowned with its smooth, fair braids. Deering lifted his hat and smiled back at her.

"That is my wife, Anna," he said gently.

For a moment he held the girl's hand in his, and in another he had stepped upon the rear end of the receding train, and was gone out of her life forever. Anna saw him like one in a dream, but the hoarse shriek of the departing whistle roused her.

In one moment she had broken down the reserve of years, and the overflow of pent-up passion left her stunned as by a blow. She stood dazed and helpless, leaning against the table where Deering had left her,

staring out through the open doorway. A man who had been walking back and forth on the platform came in by and by and stood quite close to her, his cap in hand, before she seemed aware of his presence.

"Can I get your baggage checked, or anything, Miss?" he said, politely. "B'lieve you said you's goin' north, an' your train will pass in a few minutes now."

Anna winced as she looked at him. He was the brakesman on the local train which had brought her in that morning; she remembered him by a pleasant little way he had of wrinkling his nose when he smiled.

"If you will put my things back on your train, please, I shall be glad. I am going back with you this afternoon."

The words seemed to have come from her without her own volition almost, but the sound of them strengthened her.

"That's right," said the man, soothingly, trying not to show the surprise which he felt. "Better not turn loose once you've put your hands to the plow. Some of 'em was sayin' to me this mornin' they didn't know what they'd do 'bout a school now you'd left. They said you certainly made the children learn, whatever else you did." It was faint praise enough, but Anna grasped it eagerly.

"Do you really think I can succeed if I try again?" she asked simply.

"I know you can," he said with a man's decisiveness. "Now, if I's in your place," he went on kindly, "I'd go in the ladies' room there and rest up a bit.

There ain't many 'commodations but it's better'n out here."

She followed him across the room gratefully. "I tell you," he said, as he held the door open for her, "s'pose you let me fetch a pitcher of hot water from the lunch stand over there. It'll do you the most good in the world. My wife says hot water beats all the patent medicines goin'. What do you say?"

"Oh, thank you so much; you are very kind," and there were tears in Anna's eyes as she spoke. They were tears of repentance this time, and they softened her.

The steaming water upon her face and the back of her neck refreshed her beyond measure, and by the time she had recoiled her heavy hair she felt like a new person.

The clouds had driven on westward, and by the time the brakesman came for her baggage, the sky was beautifully clear. The great prairies fairly gleamed, and the trees glistened with the sunlight on their wet leaves. The whole vast plain was one realm of beauty, as boundless as hope, as full of happy possibilities. Anna opened her window to drink in the draughts of pure ozone and felt the rich blood of a new life quicken within her. Her way lay clear before her, fair as the sky and limitless as the horizon.

The friendly brakesman was on hand to help her off when the train stopped. "I'm goin' to sen' my little girl to school to you," he said.

It was quite dark when Anna got to Mrs. Gaddy's, and she found the old woman taking her solitary supper in the little kitchen.



She hustled about, startled and disturbed by the girl's sudden appearance.

"You ain't met with no accident?" she asked sharply.

"No," said Anna, "I changed my mind about going, that is all, and I've come back to stay this time, if you will let me, please, Mrs. Gaddy."

"That's as you're a minter," said the old woman ungraciously. "Your room's as you left it. Better go in there tell I can cook you up sumpnuther fittin' to eat."

"I should be so glad if you would just let me sit here and share your supper, please, Mrs. Gaddy," Anna said, taking off her hat and cloak.

She found a plate and knife and fork on the shelf, and sat down on the other side of the deal table without waiting for the old woman to answer.

Mrs. Gaddy had a vague suspicion that the girl was daft, and scarce ate a morsel for wonderment.

When the meal was over, Anna turned up her sleeves and poured the water from the steaming kettle into the dish-pan.

"You must let me wash up dishes for you this evening, Mrs. Gaddy, if you don't mind," she said. "You see, I am beginning life over again, and it will remind me of when I was a little child, and mother used to tuck up my sleeves and stand me up in a chair beside her while she washed the dishes. Now and then she would give me a little piece from the scalding water to wipe, and it pleased me to think I was helping her."

"Your mother dead?" asked Mrs. Gaddy.

"Yes," said Anna, softly. "I am all alone in the world."

"Why didn't you tell me before, honey, why didn't you?" And the old woman put her arm about the girl's shoulders and looked at her with tears in her dim eyes. "Seem like I'd 'a knowed better how to 'a treated you if you'd a-told me."

She sat down by and by and got out her knitting, watching the girl eagerly as she went back and forth with the dishes. She was thinking of her own little girl, a slim, peaked, puny thing, who died when she was no higher than the table.

She told Anna about her after a while, dwelling on the meagre reminiscences that made up all that was left of her now. "Somehow you put me in mind of her when you's talkin' 'bout helpin' your Ma, and I can't help thinkin' what my little gal mought 'a been to me when I see you gittin' roun' so pyeart."

It had not been hard to find the way to one heart, Anna thought, as she went to sleep in her old bed that night.

She surprised the blacksmith by an early call for the key next morning, and had the schoolroom swept and a fire burning long before it was time to ring the first bell. Most of the poor little scared children, who never understood why they had been sent home the day before, were on hand when school opened, and before the week was out the desks were full.

"We've got a new teacher," they said, and Anna smiled gratefully into their happy faces.

"You are gettin' on better, Miss, fur all the place ain't fittin' fur you," said the blacksmith.

"I was not fit for the place, before," Anna said.





*"Ici, Ratton, ici!"*—Page 113.

## NEIGHBORS.

HERE are two little houses on the corner where the ragged street turns bayou-ward—two little houses just alike, showing each a sombre-grey face to the world, with a couple of brown-shuttered windows looking like a pair of sad eyes out upon the passers-by. Two small brown-trimmed doors split the space between the windows, a narrow strip of gallery runs along the front, and at the end a rickety flight of steps turns sharply, breaking through the few feet of terrace down to the grass-grown banquette. Against the corner of each house leans a straggling china tree, overshadowing the steps and rotting the shingles on the roof. A little red brick chimney-top breaks the roof line midway, and the two spirals of smoke that curl therefrom twine and intertwine their wreaths or swerve and drift apart, according to the veering of the wind.

Twin houses they are, making a landlord of Alix, the little black-browed, thick-lipped groceryman on the levee, who comes himself every month to collect the rent, and so close together are they that once the Old Madame leaning over the banisters of the one

might have shaken hands with her neighbor on the gallery of the other. Not that Madame ever thought of doing such a thing, however—oh, no!

“One must be kind to her, yes, the poor Mees Maree,” Madame would say, with a wave of her palms and a shrug of her shoulders.

“But—one must be kind to her, by the reason that we must have always charity and she is my neighbor, not? If I have a little plain sewing once a while it is just as well I give it to her; it makes nothing to me, and she must live. I have plenty, me, with my flowers and my birds and the fifty dollars monsieur sends me every month—oh, dear!” Somehow Old Madame always sighed when she spoke of monsieur. “Yes, I have plenty, me, and Mees Maree has nothing, poor thing. What makes a bit of a leg boiled in lard to me when I may have a whole turkey? And if I pass it to her out of the window, why should not a slice of bread and a sip of wine go along to keep it company and make the roses bloom in her pale cheeks, the poor thing!”

There were plenty of people whom Madame might tell these things to! Aunt Sophie, perhaps, when she drew her cart up close by the window-side and leaned out to pass Madame her little bunch of onions or a tiny measure of peas, with now and then in the spring-time, a sprig of cress from the convent marsh; or the tailoress maybe, who lived in the next block, and who came and went as clockwork, with her armful of ripping and stitching, or the men in blue blouses, friends all, who stopped on the banquette in the evenings on their way home to chat with the old woman as she

sat on the little porch behind the vines and the flower-boxes, swinging to and fro in the big chair.

She had been pretty once, this Old Madame, and she was picturesque still, with her dark hair, wrinkled skin and bright eyes. Her hair had been black, of course, when she had any, and now that it was gone she made up for it by wearing a braid and a frizzed front of the old hue. There was usually a red rose pinned low on her neck, just touching the lace of her white dress, when Madame appeared in the evenings, and her high old voice made the whole square gay as she spoke to every passer-by, bidding her toll of gossip, or calling to the little terrier that was her sole companion in the lonely house.

"He is so smart, that dog! *Ici, Ratton, ici!*" and Madame would wave her cane like a director's baton while the dog danced up and down the narrow gallery, and Miss Mary leaned over the banister to see. "Ah, ha, ah, ha, my little Ratton!" the old woman would say. "He is my baby, my only one now," and interrupting herself, she would lean forward to put her wrinkled lips on the dog's nose. "See, he loves me, *hein?* Oh, my little one, my little one!" And the little fellow would lay his head upon her knees and look up into her face with patient tenderness in his bright eyes. "See how he loves me! He looks at me with his eyes big, like my own little one, my baby, only her eyes were blue, blue and so beautiful, like monsieur's, O dear!" and the Old Madame would sigh and lay her head on Ratton's again.

Once, when Madame spoke of her blue-eyed baby, Miss Mary leaned forward eagerly and pressed her



thin hands together. "And did your baby have blue eyes too?" she asked.

"Too!" poor Miss Mary!

"Did I not tell you?" said the Old Madame, her voice brightening and a softer light coming into her eyes as she spoke. "Ah, you should have seen her, my blue-eyed little one. Monsieur's eyes she had, dark blue, like violets in the shade, with her long lashes sweeping over. God was good, not? to give me so beautiful a little one, me with my black skin and my black hair like a crow. O dear! O dear! But we were so gay then, monsieur and I and baby, and in the evenings he would come up from the shop, looking so fine, my beautiful husband, and I would dress the little one all in white, and put a rose in my hair like this, and look so nice, O dear! But we were happy, and monsieur, how proud he was, and how he would puff, puff his cigar, and take baby on his knee like this—*ici*, Ratton, *ici*! Up, *petite*, up! ah, ha, ah, ha!—he would take baby on his knee like this, and trot, trot, trot her up and down with his big legs, till she would crow and laugh and pull at his mustache, O dear me!" and Madame would crow and coo herself in an ecstasy of memories, and always end by wiping her eyes with the corner of her embroidered handkerchief.

Of this period of her existence, indeed, Old Madame seemed never to tire of telling. In fact, she had dwelt upon it and magnified it till this one memory may have swallowed up all that went before and all that came after, perhaps.

Poor Madame! Did it swallow up the memory of the old first husband—the bald-pated, watery-eyed

first husband who had brought her, a pretty young girl, from her cozy home behind the gay little Parisian glove-shop, to make her weigh coffee and sugar and meat in his dirty corner grocery ; to make her pinch and grind till her hands were rough and her face wrinkled, and her heart was starved and she hated the ugly, wizened old face of her master ? Had she forgotten, the Old Madame ? Perhaps, but when the watery eyes were closed at last forever, and Madame was left alone in the little shop with the big bank account and her starved heart, is it any wonder that the handsome young bookkeeper stepped down from his high stool one morning to find a glass of iced wine and Madame's self awaiting him in the pleasant sitting-room behind the vines ? Is it any wonder ? What mattered a slight discrepancy in their ages, with the odd years on Madame's side of the account ? The shrewd young clerk was expert in manipulating the trial-balance, and he became monsieur number two, reckoning his youth and his beauty against her love and her bank account.

Then was the spring-time of life come again to the old woman, and she forgot to pinch and to grind and to save, and grew young herself along with her young husband and her young child and her young love.

Is it any wonder then that the old monsieur was forgotten ? Any wonder that the memory of those happy days blotted the past ? Did it blot out what came after, poor Madame ? Could time or eternity do that ? Could all the love left in her heart heal the misery of it ? And would the vision of a sweet

young maiden grown to womanhood among the flowers of heaven compensate her for the little grass-grown mound back yonder in the old home? Who can say by what means He tempers the wind to the shorn lamb? Was there not enough besides to deepen the wrinkles in Madame's old cheeks and tighten the chords around her heart?

"It was only by the reason that monsieur was young," she would say sometimes to Alix when he came for the rent. Alix had swept the little glove-shop of Madame's father in the old Parisian days, and knew as well as Madame herself how the color had faded from her cheek and the lightness from her step. "Yes, monsieur was young! I must pray that I forgive him, not? We must have always charity, charity, charity, Alix. Monsieur was young, and he forgot me. That is all. I was old, old even then, but I was a woman. There is the difference. Women never forget, never. They remember with their hearts. But monsieur, is he not kind to me. He pays your rent, is it not, Alix? And he lets me have my wine and my birds and my flowers and plenty to divide with the poor. Isn't that enough for an old woman like me?"

But Alix only rolled his black eyes up under his heavy lids and turned down the corners of his thick lips for a moment. Then he bade Madame adieu, and went to collect Miss Mary's rent. Miss Mary was more than occasionally behind with her rent, poor thing, and Alix would scold and roll his black eyes under his lids, while she would stamp her foot and beg and weep and wait until he was gone to go out

and lean over the banisters with her swollen eyes and her tousled hair to tell Madame what a hard world this was to live in.

Years came and went, but their passing brought little change to the two houses; the china trees at the corner grew larger and the patch of rotten shingles spread beneath, and that was all. Yet within the one Miss Mary's cheeks grew thinner and more pinched, and within the other the Madame's grew yellower and more wrinkled. The old woman leaned more heavily upon her staff as she walked, and sometimes whole days would pass when no smoke curled from her little chimney's mouth. The bird in the cage would pick drearily among yesterday's seed husks, and Madame herself only hobbled to the door in her bedgown for the loaf which the baker had left and down into the cellar for a bottle of *vin ordinaire*.

But by and by the little houses seemed to grow closer and closer together, and if Madame saw Ratton burrowing under the dividing fence she forgot to call him back, though she always wondered afterward where he got the bones and bits that made almost his daily meals, now that her rheumatism was so bad. She would wait too, in the mornings, till a little stealthy tread had died from her own gallery and she heard Miss Mary's door close softly, to go out for the baker's loaf, but she always wondered, the shrewd Madame, what passing friend had left the new laid egg or the little breakfast-pudding which she grew to look for along with the bread. She still told her friends that they "must have always charity" when they shrugged their shoulders or nodded their heads

toward Miss Mary's closed door, and still gave Alix an extra dollar or two now and then and told him to be good to the poor thing if she had not all the rent ready for him. Poor Madame! The shadows were lengthening fast, and she drew closer and closer to the banisters under the china tree, and leaned more and more toward the other little house.

"This was my baby's first shoe," she would say sometimes, as she held out a little perfumed package for Miss Mary to see. And then Miss Mary would forget again, and fumble in her bosom for a little yellow curl tied with blue ribbon, and both their hearts would bleed anew and both their eyes would grow red with weeping.

One evening as they sat thus, so near that they might have touched each other, the Old Madame held a little casket in her lap, and now and then she opened and shut it gently, or caressed it tenderly with her wrinkled brown fingers. At the same time, beside her own little banisters, Miss Mary sat holding a little packet, now and then dropping a tear upon the pictured face that stared up at her behind its oval of glass. Was it chance or was it fate that thus they sat side by side, these two? Who can say, for it was the throbbing time of early spring, and both their hearts were stirred with the memory of long-ago love.

"He was very handsome, my baby's father," said Miss Mary softly by and by, as she rubbed the blurred glass with her thin work-hardened palm.

"A-a-h!" said Madame, and her voice was a prayer, though a gleam of yellow shot from her dim old eyes, "not handsomer than monsieur, Mees Maree,

not handsomer than my beautiful husband. Wait till I show you."

"And I, Madame," said Miss Mary.

Madame opened the casket with a click, and both leaned forward eagerly. They were very near together, the two hands, and as Miss Mary looked into Madame's she saw the smiling face of her baby's father; as Madame looked into Miss Mary's she saw the beautiful face of monsieur. Was it chance or fate?

"O God!" said Miss Mary, and the two pictures fell face downward, crushed and broken in the weeds that grew and sprawled upon the dividing fence.

And the Old Madame? Where now was the curse she had held in her heart so long for the woman who had stolen monsieur's love? Lift up your voice, Madame, and curse her face to face. She must have been pretty once with her yellow hair and her blue eyes; she must have been young not very long ago, have you forgotten, Madame? Curse her now though the hair is grey and the eyes are faded; have you forgotten, Madame?

Poor Madame! They were Miss Mary's arms that picked her up and laid her on the bed behind the curtains by and by, but she stirred not nor spoke. The nimble old tongue had lost its cunning forever, the poor tottering old limbs were paralyzed.

The days are passing still over the heads of the two neighbors, but one little house covers them both now. Miss Mary flits almost gayly about among the flowers and birds on Madame's gallery, or chats with

the friends when they stop on the banquette in the evenings, but oftenest she sits beside the old woman's bed singing and sewing, and the poor dim eyes that watch for her coming are soft with love and tenderness.

Who indeed shall say how He may temper the wind to the shorn lamb?





## ANOTHER VALENTINE.

I LINGERED a moment with my hand on the latch, leaning upon the gate, and looking over at the straggling flower-beds and the little grass-grown walks which led to the old house beyond. A poor, tumbled-down house it was, to be sure, yet how much a part of Miss Letty's very self it seemed, growing grey just as she grew grey, in little patches where the rain had stained and the paint had crumbled off. In the old garden, the cedars and boxwood had grown gnarled and woody, and cape-jessamines burst their young spring buds high on the ancient stock almost out of reach. Crepe-myrtles and altheas met in a tangled archway that led from the gate to the house, where honey-suckle and ivy clustered close around the eaves.

There began a lively tapping on one of the window-panes within as I loitered, and looking up, I saw Miss Letty shaking a slim thimbled finger at me.

"Come in, child, do," she said, when I opened the door behind her, and poked my head in, "you'll catch your death out there on the damp ground, without your rubbers, too, I'll be bound."

"Why, Miss Letty, it is almost spring-time," I said, with the door-knob still in my hand, "and already the young grass is beginning to peep up here and there, and I am sure there are pink tips swelling on the tea-roses. Please come and see."

"Are you coming in, Eleanor?" asked Miss Letty, in a tone of voice which would have commanded obedience even if she had not called me Eleanor, instead of Nell, which latter is all that I ever hoped for from my friends.

"What is it, Miss Letty, please?" I said, closing the door with a bang, wondering at the dear old lady's unwonted excitement.

"What do you suppose?" she asked with a smile, as she folded her work, giving a little tap on top of it, and putting away her needle and thimble.

"Not the—piano—" I began fearfully.

But Miss Letty broke me off eagerly. "Yes, it is tho' Nell, just," she said, as she looked up at me over her steel-rimmed glasses, shaking her temple curls at me gayly.

"O Miss Letty! Where is it?" I cried, joyfully peering about as if I expected to see a piano hiding in every corner, or peeping out from under every chair.

"What a little goose you are, Nell," said Miss Letty in her pleased little way. "It isn't bought yet you know, I only wanted you to recount the money with me to be sure there is enough, and then we shall see at once about getting the piano."

"O you sweet Miss Letty," I cried, catching her in my arms and whirling her about with me till our heads were dizzy.

"Suppose some one had seen us, Nell, you silly child," Miss Letty remonstrated when she had got her breath. "How old are you anyway, nine?"

"Twice nine, Miss Letty, and 'going on,'" I said. "But it makes me feel young again to think of having the piano at last."

"At last, and you only eighteen," said Miss Letty a little wistfully. "Heigho! But never mind, I am to have it at last, as you say. Now I am going to get my strong box, and I want you to count the savings over for me."

One by one we spread out the bills, and piled up the coins till the little, round, marble-topped table was full of Miss Letty's small hoard, and I looked at it all reverently, each piece becoming sacred to me when I thought of the years of privation and toil it had cost her.

"Do you know what that is, Nell?" said Miss Letty, unfolding a silver dollar from its little wrapper of white paper. "That was for making your first short frock. You don't remember it—a white lawn with a pink leaf, and you looked for all the world when you had it on as if a shower of peach-blow petals had fallen on you. I can see you now. And this yellow gold piece was for making your mother's wedding dress, think of it. A white silk it was, that stood alone when it was finished. And this was for making Mr. Pitman's last pepper-and-salt. Poor old man! They buried him in it. He asked them to, the day before he died, because, as he said, it 'sot to him' better than anything he ever had on his back."

"What do you 'spose that little bit was for?" asked Miss Letty by and by, as she emptied a few small coins, all quarters and dimes and nickles out on the table, drawing them up together. "That was for making Mary Ann Perry's wedding dress. The bargain was that I should only help, and get four dollars and six bits for my work. But you know how things are sometimes. If Mary Ann herself stuck needle in that lilac delaine of hers I never found it out, and after all, three ten was all I ever got for making it. Mary Ann was always close, even when she was a girl; just for the world like her old father before her. You've heard tell how d'reckly after the surrender folks had to go to work and hire negroes, allowing them a fourth of the crop as wages. Well, old man Runnells, Mary Ann's father that was, he honeyfugled many a poor ignorant negro into believing that a fourth warn't enough, and caused them to leave good homes to go and work for a fifth with him. So you see Mary Ann come honestly by her shrewdness, and I reckon we ought to bear this in mind, and excuse it in her more than we are prone to do."

Five hundred dollars was all the box contained, and every piece of it teeming with memories for dear Miss Letty—memories into which she had pricked with her busy needle the patient pattern of her life—memories that brought the tears into her old eyes now and then as she told of them, and into mine too as I listened.

"Tell me all about the piano," I said to her once as I sat beside her watching her busy needle come and go, "tell me from the very beginning."

"Well, I don't know the very beginning myself," she had answered. "I can't remember when I did not want a piano. But father wasn't rich you know, ever, and so I had to wait. He promised when I began taking music lessons that I might have one if my teacher thought I had any talent, and I remember as if it were yesterday, how pleased he was at the end of the session, when I played 'Home, Sweet Home,' with variations, and never lost a note. I got the silver music-medal too that night, don't you remember, I showed it to you once, with 'perseverance' engraved across the face? Father was very proud of me, and the people all applauded, and Rob Taylor threw me a bouquet. It was all sweet-shrub and wild honeysuckle and yellow jessamine that he had plucked in the woods as he came along, but my! I can smell them yet."

When Miss Letty stooped down to bite off her thread, it was a tear that she wiped from her eye?

"What ever became of him, Miss Letty?" asked, poor, little, romantic soul that I was, forgetting my politeness, "what became of the boy that threw the flowers."

"What difference does that make, child, I wonder," she said a little sharply for Miss Letty, I fancied. "Do you want me to tell you about the piano?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Letty, please," and she went on.

"As I was saying when you interrupted me, father was very proud of me, and got Mr. Rogers to write to his commission merchant in New Orleans to see about a piano for me. But the war was coming on then, and we waited, and pretty soon it was come and

gone, and with it the money to buy the piano. Poor father! There was so many of us then to provide for, tho' I'm the only one of the family left now, deary me! Dick never came back from the war, and mother died soon after, and the girls followed one by one. Somehow, there warn't any of 'em strong, and pretty soon father died. The little plantation had to go then to pay debts, poor father, and there was left only the little home-place. I went to teaching music then at the college—the old college, child, that stood behind the church by the laboratory well—but it warn't long before that burned. I remember how I cried the night of the fire, but it was all because of the piano, the poor, battered, tuneless old thing that I had practiced on. Well, after the college was gone, there was no school of any kind in Mt. Lebanon for a long time, and there was nothing for me but sewing. I don't mean to complain, for I've always had plenty to do, and I made up my mind at the start that I would lay by a little every year till I had saved enough to buy a piano. It seems a long time to you child, doesn't it? But God has been very good to me." Poor Miss Letty!

There was not many pianos left in the whole town then; the doctor's daughter had one, and Mrs. Rodgers another, and there were one or two more among the old families, and at these we all loved to see Miss Letty sit, with a glad light in her dim old eyes, and her nimble fingers chasing each other over the keys. Indeed, had not most of us learned our first dancing steps to Miss Letty's playing? And surely there was music enough yet in her "Virginia Reel" and "Sol-



dier's Joy " to set us all a-tingle to the tune of it, and we grew up looking forward, as for a great joy that was to come into our narrow lives, to an endless round of reels and cotillions, when Miss Letty should have a piano of her very own.

We younger ones could not remember when Miss Letty had not made our "Sunday dresses" for us. But this, however, I think most of us accepted as a special favor vouchsafed to us just as we did the sugar-plums and tea-cake that we sometimes found in the pocket of a new lindsey frock at its first outing, comfortably stored away here by Miss Letty to help us over the tedium of Sunday's sermon. I can distinctly recall more than one occasion when I sat in my pew-corner discretely munching my pocket's treasure-trove, to the tune of "Am I a Soldier of the Cross." I was fired by the martial strains to buy a piano myself and present it to Miss Letty, when I grew up.

Somehow, it seemed to me as I looked back upon it, that there had once been a time when all the hopes of the village had been centered around Miss Letty's piano. We had all heard our mothers say over and often that they would have Miss Letty in for a day's sewing, since it would give them a lift, and help along with the piano. Some of us had heard our fathers say that they would order an extra soft bit of stuff from the little factory that sent its brown smoke curling up above the tree-tops beyond the tan-yard, and have Miss Letty make a suit. "It will wear better than ready-made clothes do," they would say, "and besides, it will count toward the piano."

But gradually as our keen interest must have



waned, we all knew that the little spark of hope still glowed fresh and warm in Miss Letty's breast, and we respected it, even the younger ones, though we passed beyond the days of wide-eyed wonderment when the rumble of a heavy wagon would send us running to the window to see if the piano were coming at last. And I think none of us quite forgave old Peter Smith for scoffing at Miss Letty's little hope. To be sure old Peter scoffed with impunity at everything in heaven and on earth, but when it came to Miss Letty, and in such a public way, that was more than the village people could submit to. It came about in this way, for we all heard of it; one day as the little German shoemaker sat in the midst of his busy pegging, singing in his bright, cheery voice, so that all the town might hear, "Dere's a better time a-coming, Hallelujah!" old Peter had taken his pipe from his mouth, and, perhaps impressed with the enormity of his daring, had for once in his life spit quite clear of the store-gallery, to say to the crowd of loungers that hung about, "Yes, there's a better time a-comin', but, plague-on-it, it's like Miss Letty's piano, it never gits here."

I was thinking of just this while Miss Letty went to put the tin box away, and that I should like to be the first to tell old Peter when the piano came.

Consumed with this devout desire, I got no further in my retrospect when I heard the little front gate creak on its hinges, and Miss Letty returned a moment later, bringing Mary Ann Perry in with her.

Everybody in the village called her Mary Ann, and we younger ones were no exceptions, elsewhere

than before her face, whose thin, sharp features underneath her flapping sunbonnet were the butt of a perennial jest among us.

"Don't you think your fire is mighty brisk for this time o' year, Letitia," said Mary Ann, taking a half-way seat on the edge of her chair, and fanning herself with her sunbonnet.

"I don't know as I had thought of it, Mary Ann. Does the room seem close to you?" asked Miss Letty, rising to lift a window.

"Oh, it warn't that I meant," interposed Mary Ann. "I guess I can stand as much heat as anybody, seein' I've been used to good fires all my life. I was only thinking times is mighty hard for so much wood to be wasted."

"Well, maybe you're right, Mary Ann," answered Miss Letty, taking her seat, and folding her hands on her lap placidly. "Hard times has been the cry ever since I can remember, but I don't know as they seem to get any harder now. However, father always told me I didn't have a saving bone in me. As he said—poor father—I burnt off my candle double at one end what I saved at the other."

"Well, of course you are free to do as you please, Letitia," said Mary Ann. "You are just one to yourself, and when you are gone, you'll leave none behind to suffer. But as for times bein' no harder, whatever are you thinkin' of? What's to hinder them f'om bein' hard, with cotton at five cents, and meat a-gettin' higher? Maybe you just ain't had it brought home to you, but there's no tellin' how soon it may come. As for me, now, I can't he'p f'om

feelin' sorry for them as do suffer, even if I'm spared myself, which I thank God I have been, so far. There's Rob Taylor, f'rinstance. S'pose you've heard tell o' his trouble."

I saw Miss Letty's eyelids quiver behind her spectacles, as she snatched the little hearth-broom from the brass rack in the corner, and began to sweep the immaculate bricks desperately in search of an imaginary ash. But Mary Ann went on.

"Yes, there's Rob and his folks goin' to be turned out into the big road come the fourteenth, they say. Reckon it'll go hard on 'em all, him an' his wife both gittin' along in years, an' with their big housefull of girls, too. Somehow, tho', I can't seem to he'p f'om feelin' it's a kinder judgment sent on Rob. I ain't never got over the way he done you, Letty, goin' off that-away without a word, and you never hearin' nothin' tel news come that he was married to Lou Abererombie over there to Arcady. 'Twarn't right o' Rob, and I, for one, always said so."

"I think most of you have been too hard on Rob, maybe, Mary Ann," said Miss Letty, gently. "His word was not given to me ever, and he had a right to marry whom he pleased." The words came a little tremulously towards the end, but she finished them quite bravely.

"Well, that's as you're a mind to look at it," Mary Ann replied. "Rob was as good as bound to you, word or no word, an' kept away more than one man as might have made you a good husband. You can't he'p f'om knowin' that now, Letty, for all you say. An' that's why I say it seem like a judgment sent on

Rob. Not that I think you've missed anything by not marryin' him, for he never was no great shakes, nohow, an' it just shows how low down he's got when he's goin' to be sold out to satisfy a claim for five hundred dollars."

"Five hundred dollars?" Miss Letty fairly gasped. "Five hundred dollars, did you say, Mary Ann?"

"Yes, that's all, an' it do seem a pitiful sum now, don't it, when you think of the fortune he got by Lou Abererombie. That proves this is a punishment for him ever marryin' of her."

"Five hundred dollars! Just five hundred!" Miss Letty said over and over again, her voice sounding scarce above a whisper. "It seems like providence!"

"Who did you say held this mortgage, Mary Ann—this mortgage against Rob Taylor?" she asked by and by, with a firmness that startled me, it was so sudden.

"The mortgage—who holds it, 'd you say, Letitia?" said Mary Ann hesitatingly. "Oh, Perry, you know, he holds it. Rob, he got money f'om us two year ago when his wife was so low an' the chillun was down sick."

"Five hundred dollars—" Miss Letty began again. "Wait a moment, Mary Ann, please," she went on quite firmly, "and do you come with me, Nellie, child, just—"

I think I had never seen my dear Miss Letty look quite so determined, tho' her hands were working nervously together.

"Oh, you must not do it, Miss Letty, dear, indeed and indeed you must not!" I said, divining her purpose, and putting my arms about her when the door had closed behind us.

She turned my head back, looking into my face for a moment without speaking, while her poor wrinkled old lips trembled, and the tears trickled down her cheeks.

"Suppose you were me, and Rob was Albert Marey, what then, child?" she asked softly.

And I? Then for answer, I only drew her closer up to me and kissed the poor, trembling, patient old lips.

She made me carry the little tin box in, and she and Mary Ann stood by the table silent, uncomprehending while I counted over again Miss Letty's life-long savings.

"There it is, Mary Ann," she said, when I was done. "Just five hundred dollars, you see. That is what you said Rob owed you, wasn't it? Take it, Mary Ann, take it, please, and—go."

"But the piano, Letty?" asked Mary Ann, almost gently.

"That will wait, and you won't, I'm afraid, Mary Ann," Miss Letty said.

Mary Ann looked up hastily, but she was not quite equal to the passing thought of generosity. Rob Taylor's farm was a poor one at best, and five hundred dollars was a goodly price for it.

"Do you come home with me, child," she said when she had gathered up all the money from the table, putting it into the crown of her bonnet, "do

you come with me, and take a receipt for this. I want ever'thing to be straight."

When I came back by and by with the receipt, I found Miss Letty sitting before the fire looking into the crumbling coals, a little faded gleam of youth in her dim blue eyes, and a sandal-wood box in her hands.

"These were Rob's presents to me," she said quite sweetly, showing within the uncertain, daguerreotyped face of a handsome, black-eyed boy with a slack mouth, a crumbled bouquet of what had once been jessamine and azalea and sweet shrub, and on top of all a little old-fashioned valentine, faded and yellow with age. "From your valentine," was scrawled in an unsteady, boyish hand across one corner.

"He knew I would understand," said Miss Letty, simply. "And now, Nell, I think I shall write just the same, you know, 'from your valentine,' and send it with this receipt to Rob. It can make no difference to Lou Abercrombie, and Rob will not know—perhaps."

Poor Miss Letty, putting all the love of a lifetime into one little "perhaps."



## MEXICAN JOE'S FREEDOM.

MEXICAN JOE was the most notorious cattle stealer in the whole valley, and the wonder was that his handsome brown neck had escaped the halter. But times had changed in Texas since the days when justice was administered summarily, and to the point—usually a rope's point. So about the little cabin across the creek, where Joe and Ninita kept house, there were always hanging strings of meat for the sun to dry.

But Joe had always ready a way of explaining his possession of the meat strings and the tallow and hides which kept him in whisky and tobacco, and the droves that he depleted by his careful depredations were so far away that there were no means of tracing his roguery.

But, of course, a day of reckoning did come for Joe, as it comes for all of us sooner or later, though it was not his cattle-stealing that brought it about.

One day during the summer a man had been found murdered on the other side of Flat Top, and the most earnest effort resulted in the discovery of no clue to the guilty party. The District Attorney was a new



man, a tall young fellow, who set his broad-brimmed hat a little jauntily a-top of his over-long locks, but the evil-doers knew him for a "hustler" nevertheless. Nobody was surprised therefore, when, the following winter, the murdered man's watch and knife were found in pawn at the second-hand store on the corner, and Mexican Joe was arrested.

The trial created a stir in quiet little Lampasas, and the courthouse was crowded with spectators. There was some difficulty in impaneling a jury, and the case began to draw itself out, but the interest did not waver.

The only listless figure in the whole crowd was Ninita.

Never once, as the case dragged, and witness after witness rose for testimony, did she turn her big, beautiful eyes towards the prisoner's box. With the shawl still pinned up about her pretty, brown-skinned face, she sat, not moving, save now and then to dispense the little shuck rolls from her basket to the hungry people about her, slipping the nickels carefully into her bosom. When adjournment came, she would swing her basket over her arm, and moving with the crowd, call out "Hot tamales!" with sweet-voiced indifference.

But finally the last day came. The District Attorney made a strong case, telling off a string of Joe's evil deeds, which were as he said, "too numerous to mention."

The attorney for the defence, a young fellow whom the Court had appointed, did the best he could with the material in hand. At the end of his flowery

speech he made an appeal in behalf of Ninita, pointing to her with a mighty flourish of his long arm, and calling her a "poor, heart-broken wife."

But she, the "poor, heart-broken wife," sat dry-eyed and stolid through it all, and the solemn-looking jury filed out, to return almost immediately, with a verdict of guilty.

Then, and not till then, Ninita looked at Joe, and a glance that puzzled those who saw it, flashed back at her from his great dark eyes. It might have been a challenge; it might have been a question; was it a command, or was it a farewell?

She got up when all was over, slipping out through the crowd, but lingered in the square without till the sheriff came leading the prisoner to the little stone jail across the way, whence he was to be taken next day to Austin.

In a little while Joe's face was to be seen behind the bars in one of the upper windows, but Ninita seemed scarce to notice him. Without speaking, she pulled her shawl close around her and passed quickly down the street and across the bridge.

That night a type-setter going home late from the office saw a woman flit by him in the moonlight, and crouch down in the shadows of the prison wall. He, too, crossed over and waited, hidden by the darkness.

By and by the crouching figure arose, a pebble rattled against the window overhead, and Joe's face appeared behind the bars, all lit up in the moonlight.

"Is it you, Ninita?" he said.

"It is I, my Josê," she answered softly, in her sweet-voiced Spanish. "Is there no other way?"

"No other way," he said quietly. "I am ready."

"Holy Mother of God intercede for thee and me," she prayed, kneeling and crossing herself.

"Amen!" came Joe's deep-voiced response.

"Pull yourself up by the bars, my Josè, that I may not touch your beautiful face, and close your lids, that I may not look into your dear eyes."

He did as she had bidden him, holding on to the stout bars. "I am ready," he said.

"Adios, my Josè."

"Adios, my Ninita."

She put her hand to her bosom, there was a little gleam of steel in the moonlight, a pistol shot rang out clear and sharp on the night air, and the woman turned and fled into the darkness.

The relaxed hands loosed hold of the bars above, there was a heavy fall upon the floor within, and Mexican Joe was free.



## AT THE TURN OF THE STAIR.

A GREAT, wide handsome stair it is, with comfortable steps and railing of carved oak, and somehow it seems to Starr that he loves it more than any other part of the whole house. Perhaps this is because he always pictures Anice upon it, just as he saw her for the first time that Christmas morning long ago.

He was sitting alone in the great hall before the big open fire waiting for Robert to come down, when a soft tread upon the steps made him look up, and he saw Anice. She had stopped at the broad turn of the stair to pluck a bit of trailing vine that hung from the high arched window's ledge, and the early morning sun broke itself about her, besprinkling her blue dress and her gold-brown hair.

She came down when she saw him, holding out her hand. "I am Anice," she said, simply. "Robert told us to expect you, and we are very glad you are come."

That was all, but even then Starr loved her. She was only a slip of a girl in those days, and he was not a right young man, but he waited, watching for her

every morning during the holidays, and feeling glad the whole day through if he caught a glimpse of her as she came down the stair.

For three years Starr came at intervals with Robert, all the while growing more and more to love the young sister of his friend, and finding always a hearty welcome in his house. The Hastings were people whom everybody knew and everybody liked. Judge Hastings was a hearty, cheerful old man, well past middle life, and his wife was one of those rare beings who are ever young because of the youth in their hearts. Besides Anice was an older daughter, Betty, and these, with Robert, made up the family. The two girls belonged to the same general type, and to the casual observer seemed much alike. But the resemblance was slight at most, and Starr never saw it, always secretly resenting any observance of it by others.

Horace Starr was, as I have said, not a young man. His habits of life and character were well grounded, and grey hairs were beginning to show pretty thickly among the black above his temple, but, in spite of this, he was in some respects a man quite unused to the ways of the world. Big of limb and strong of body, he had a mind considerably above the average, which every advantage of travel and study had conspired to cultivate. Yet he was, in one respect, at least, a painfully timid man. He would have stood unflinchingly before the cannon's mouth, and was in all his relations with men a man, yet withal he had a most intense and ungovernable fear of women. Even his own mother inspired him with

a kind of awe which he could never quite overcome, and it was with much the same feeling that he regarded Anice, in spite of his great love for her. This made him timid before her, and through all the years he had not spoken, only half fancying that she could ever care for him, and living during the absences from her upon the picture of her with the sunlight on her face.

One morning—it was Christmas, the fourth since he had known Anice—Starr sat before the fresh-built fire in the wide hall, watching the flame tongues flare and flicker and reflect themselves in the high brass hand-irons and polished fender. He was waiting till he should hear Anice's footfall on the stair. He had studied her well through the years, and knew it was her custom to be earliest down in the morning, and he had always meant to stop her sometime just at the turning when the sun lighted all her face, and tell her that he loved her.

Was she later than usual this morning, or only his own perturbation that made him think so? He felt his heart beat louder than the crackling of the fire, and the passing minutes seemed hours in his eager expectancy.

But, at last! There was a sound of her footstep, and the soft, almost inaudible murmur of garments. She was coming! He waited till she paused upon the turn of the stair and then himself sprang up the few intervening steps to meet her. It seemed to him that his feet scarce touched the stair, and he trembled so that he held on to the railing for support. There she stood in the old place, to be sure, with her head

slightly turned and her sweet face making now only a blot against the pane, for the sun was streaming down to him and blinding his eyes.

"Do not come down, please," he said very gently, holding out his hand to her. "I have been waiting to speak to you just here. I wanted to tell you that I love you, and ask you to be my wife."

His head was in a whirl, and he bowed it as if in prayer. He heard her take a step forward, he felt her put her little hand in his outstretched one, and, lifting his glad eyes, he found himself face to face with—Betty.

"I shall not say this is a surprise to me, Horace," she was saying, "for I have hoped for it always, and have loved you always."

But he heard as one in a dream, feeling his life-tide ebbing with every word, for behind her, coming down the stair, was Anice. Horace looked up at her as she came under the window, and would have thrown himself down at her feet for the very love of her, but Betty stood aside to let her pass, and she swept by him unheeding, her beautiful face all full of pain, and a look in her eyes that crushed him. Was it for this he had waited? O God! O God! He fancied that he cried aloud in the enormity of his grief, and would have fallen, but Betty, all unheeding in her own joy, slipped her arm in his and led rather than followed him down the stairs.

"I have brought you a son for a Christmas present," she said gayly, as they met her father and mother on the way to the breakfast room, but Horace received their cheerful greeting silently. His heart



was bursting, and he longed to cry out his great love for Anice and curse the confusion of his horrible blunder. Yet—he dared not! Betty had said she loved, had promised to be his wife! He was no longer free! He might never more wait for Anice on the stair, nor start up glad for her coming. Was this the price of a man's honor? O God! O God! Was the suffering only his to bear? What meant the strange look in Anice's eyes when she passed him? She had heard, and misunderstood, and now he could never tell her. O God! O God!

How the breakfast passed he never knew, except that Anice did not come. Some one found her by and by, in the little copse behind the rose garden, lying prone upon the frosty earth with the same tense look on her beautiful young face. They picked her up and carried her in, but, save for a pitiful moan as they bore her o'er the turning of the stair, she neither spoke nor uttered a sound. All through the weary days of waiting, as she lay 'twixt life and death, no word escaped her; only the sharp look of silent suffering never left her face. But once when Betty carried Horace into the room to see her, she turned her big blue eyes up to him and smiled. Had she understood? But the eyelids quivered, the smile faded from the poor still lips that might speak no more forever!

Horace buried his face in his hand and wept with the sorrow of a strong man stricken when they bore the poor prone body down the stair. The sun in his glory glinted on the silver of the coffin, and the trailing vine swept across it tenderly, but he might

not kiss the poor dead lips of the woman whom he loved!

Long years have passed since then, but the early Christmas morning finds Horace ever faithful at his vigil in the wide hall before the glowing fire, and sometimes he will start up, fancying he hears a step on the stair, and that he will see Anice coming to him across the weary waiting time.

"Have you come at last, Anice?" he will cry joyously, to hear Betty's voice call down to him: "It is I, Horace, dear. Why do you always call me Anice, at Christmas time, I wonder?"

And he only puts his hand before his eyes to keep in yet a little while the picture of his love upon the turning of the stair.



## ONLY A TRAMP.

DAY after day passed, bringing no rain to the thirsty, windblown valley. The sun came up every morning into a dry, empty sky, and every evening sank down behind the brown hills in a perfect blaze of glory. The drouth held full sway. Tanks were dry, cisterns were drained, and for all the thirsting cattle in the parching pastures there was left only the water of the little cress-grown creek, which, skirting the town, bore on to the river the salt and sulphurous flow from Lampasas' never-failing springs.

From north and south and east and west, through all the sun-struck valley, came cowboys driving their herds down the narrow streets to the cool creek-side.

One quiet evening down the western hill-slope, there came a band in full swing, the dry grass breaking crisply beneath the cattle's tread and the fine dust stirred into a dense cloud. Straight on eastward, toward the ford, spurred the leading horseman, calling out his musical halloo; but the grateful smell of the salt water near at hand reached the eager nostrils

of the thirsty cattle, and down an unprotected alleyway running southward, the head of the band turned sharply. In a moment, with digging of spurs, with whoop and halloo and shout and whistle, the horsemen were after, and some even gained the head of the onrushing column. But, "let 'em go," called the leader, above the mingle of voices, and the stampeding drove, with five hundred parching throats, followed panting down the narrow lane between lines of barbed wire fence.

A man coming through the alley from the other end, saw the onrushing drove and waited, looking about him frightened and helpless. A pitiful figure he must have been at any time with his poor, stooped shoulders, and his ragged, dust-stained clothes, but in the face of the oncoming danger, he stood a picture of utter impotency.

"Head off the idiot struck dumb there," yelled a cowboy from the rear.

"Come off! He's only a tramp. Let him run for it," called back the leader, cutting at the man with his quirt as he galloped by. "Clear out of this, can't you?"

At first the man only started; then, reaching up his arm, he grasped the stout limb of a mesquite under which he was standing, and pulled himself up into the tree, his long legs dangling.

"Take in your shanks, you bloomin' coward," said the cowboy spurring past. There was a sharp whistle as the riata sped through the air, and the man in the tree felt the well-aimed rope whirr across his feet, cutting and burniug into the thin ankles that

showed between the ragged trousers and low, lopping shoes.

But there was someone else in the narrow street besides the tramp who saw with consternation the onrushing, maddened cattle. In the middle of the alley, half-hidden by a clump of green-white milkweed, a child, a little thing, scarce more than a babe, stopped her gathering of prickly cactus apples, and stood unmoving with wide-open, startled eyes. One of the galloping cowboys, casting his eye backward over his shoulder, caught sight of the little white still figure, and turned his pony sharply, but the mad cows were coming with frantic pace, snorting and bellowing in the dust-cloud.

And the man up in the tree? Looking down from his perch of safety, he saw the child almost beneath him. The rose-red juice of the cactus fruit had stained her lips and dripped down upon her white dress. My God! It looked like blood. The blood of a young child—O God! O God!

With one wild leap through the feathery mesquite boughs the man was on his feet, a pistol in each outstretched hand, between the child and the on-coming death. Above the tumult of shout and bellow the bullets sang out clear and sharp: the two foremost cows snorted, sprang their length, and dropped dead in the dust. There was gained only a second's interval, but with sudden swerve the cowboy had caught the child up before him and was galloping on in safety.

And the tramp?

They picked him up by and by when the moving mass of hoofs and horns had passed in the dust-cloud,

his poor mangled body begrimed with his own life's blood.

It was the longest procession Lampasas had ever seen which followed up the northern hill-slope to the little cemetery next day. The cowboys, with big spurs rattling and high heels clinking against the stones, bore the coffin all the way on their shoulders. In no other way could they so honor the man whom, in the pride of their centaur-like horsemanship, they had taunted as "a tramp."

They knew no name to carve upon the marble shaft they reared above him, taller than any in the whole grave-yard, but on the stone one reads now :

"To the memory"—not of a tramp, but "of a hero."



## THE WILD HUNTSMAN OF SEQUATCHIE VALLEY.

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### CHAPTER I.

ALAN GIEFFARD, scrambling thro' the tangle of underbrush, came suddenly upon a little clearing against the mountain-side which seemed scarce large enough for the one rickety cabin that it held nestling there with its green cabbage garden and few seraggy, stunted fruit trees among the over-hanging oaks and chestnuts. He was quite heated by his long pull, and sat down to rest a moment on a little ledge of rock, putting his color-box down beside him.

"Tired, ain't yer?" He was startled by hearing a voice ask just above him, and looking up he saw, leaning against the broken, half-tumbled-down rail fence, a thin-faced, keen-eyed old woman, who stood contemplating him quite complacently.

"Pretty tired," he said, good-naturedly, smiling up at her with his frank, grey eyes. "I've lost my way, too, and have had quite a scramble of it over these rocks."



"Lost, air yer? Now that's a purty come off, ain't it? Stoppin' up to Monteagle?" the old woman asked.

"Yes," Giffard answered.

"Air yer to the hotel, or on the Groun's?"

"On the Grounds."

"Many folks thar now?"

"I don't know, I am sure," he said. "I have only just come myself, and this is my first season."

The old woman looked him over from head to foot quite seriously for a moment, with her chin resting upon her folded arms on the fence. Then, fixing her gaze upon the box at Giffard's feet, she said, with a little dip of her head:

"Book agent?"

"No," he said, his eyes following her gaze: "that's a color-box. I am a painter."

"Oh, yer air?" she said. "'Lowed yer's sump'-nother time I seen yer didn't have no legs to yer pants."

"Knickerbockers are better for climbing over your rocks," he said, laughingly, as he got up. "And now, will you be kind enough to direct me to the shortest trail up to Monteagle?"

"The Pipe Line's the nighest way up," she said, without moving.

"The Pipe Line? What is that?" he asked.

"The trail up 'long the line er pipe that takes the water up to Monteagle f'um the spring down thar in the valley. It's the nighest cut, but you couldn't never fin' it by yerse'f."

"I think I should like to try, if you will direct me," he said, picking up his box.

"Don't jes' know whar 'tis myse'f," the old woman went on, still unperturbed. "Ain't never to say been thater way, but Loanne here'll show yer."

For the first time, Alan noticed the girl who had come up from beneath the peach-trees, and was standing behind her mother. She was a tall, slender, unformed young thing, with a glow of color under her brown skin, and a subdued fire in her large, dark eyes. There was an irregularity and lack of harmonious development about the face that made it fall short of being a pretty one, but even the severe arrangement of the coal-black, straight hair, which was parted down the middle and brushed into a tight coil high off the neck behind, did not mar the beauty of the well-poised head.

Giffard noted all this as he followed her quick free strides up the mountain path. Once, an over-hanging branch caught the skirt of her thin calico dress, and her foot slipped on a stone. In a moment he was beside her, and, having released her, held out his hand to help her up the next turning. She looked at him a little curiously from beneath her long lashes, and sprang lightly up before him again. She did not speak during the whole way, and at last, when they had climbed up under the projecting stones of Warren's Point, and the peaceful hazy valley lay stretched below, with the sun just dipping like a ball of fire behind the blue peaks beyond, she only gave a little sidelong glance at Giffard, and, with a gesture that was comprehensive in its very simplicity, waved her hand outward toward the mists and the mountains and the sunset.

"Beautiful," he said, answering the question of her look, and following her to the Point's edge.

"It's purtier'n that over thar beyant the mountains where the sun's gone," she said.

"You've been over there?" he asked, looking down at her.

"No," she said, without turning her head. "I ain't been, that's how I know it's purtier there."

"That is rather doubtful philosophy, I fear," said Giffard, moving nearer to the edge. A moment later, when he turned to speak to the girl, she was gone, and he followed the broad sandy road which he knew would lead him to the Assembly Grounds. Meanwhile, the girl, dropping quickly down the accustomed trail, was startled when she emerged into the mountain road below, to hear the loose rattle of an empty wagon.

"Come up thar, Baldy," said the driver, in the slow mountain drawl.

"Lor', it's Dave," said Loanne, springing back and hiding herself among the dense growth that overhung the road.

The slow lazy oxen passed up the rocky road beneath her, the loose plank that stood for wagon-body rattled noisily, and upon them the empty barrels bumped tipsily together at every jolt. Behind, with long slow strides, followed Dave, clad in an ample shirt of blue stripes and wide trousers of brown jeans. His big ash-colored felt hat flopped down over his ears, his scant, straw-colored hair hung lankly upon his thin neck, and his small grey-blue eyes were closely set above his sallow cheeks.

Loanne had crouched down behind an uprooted tree, but as Dave came up just below, a loose stone, displaced by her foot, rattled noisily in the wooded stillness down into the road before him.

"Lor', Loanne, I like ter not seen yer," he said, springing up the slope, and laying his hand on her arm.

"Lemme loose, Dave Byee," she said. There was a look in her eyes that Dave did not understand, and her words startled him.

"Lor', Loanne, did I skeer yer? Sho' I 'lowed yer seen me an' war jes' hidin' ter devil me, sho' I did," he said, conciliatorily.

"I been't skeert." The girl's eyes flashed down at him, and she drew well back amid the scraggy, up-turned roots.

"Well, what ails yer now, Loanne? Yer been't mad, be yer? Sho', yer know I never aimed to pester yer. I war jes' stud'in' bout'n yer whenst I come erlong. Seem's ef I been stud'in' bout yer sence yer warn't no higher'n my boot-leg, and yer been't goin' back on me now, be yer? Sence yer give me yer word to marry me, seem's ef the groun's been too sorf ter tread on an' I's minin' to go down thar an' git yer on my way back an' take yer down the cove ter see how nice the little cabin looks. It's all ready an' waitin' fur yer, Loanne, an' yistiddy I cut a gum log down the ravine, an' sot it up under the ol' ches'nut tree fur yer ash-hopper, an' I made a bench fur the tubs down ter the spring."

Dave paused, but the girl did not speak and he went on again.

"It's mighty lonesome thar now waitin' fur yer, but sometimes, whenst I shet my eyes, seems 'sef yer air jes' settin' thar on the yuther side the chimbly-cornder with yer knittin' in yer han's, an' sometimes I kin hear yer singin' an' badlin' clothes down thar on the little bench 'mongst the laurel. But it's mighty lonesome waitin', an' yer been't mad—yer been't goin' back on me now, Loanne?"

The girl leaned suddenly toward him. There was a quick light in her eyes, and she said, laughingly, "Well, you be a fool, Dave, but I ain't mad."

Dave made a step forward and reached out his hand, but she was too quick for him. Putting both her hands upon his broad shoulders, she gave a sudden push that sent him sliding down the slope, the dislodged stones rattling about him.

"Yer better g'long after the steers, Dave, or the rackety bar'ls will drap over an' lose all yer pig-slop," called Loanne, as she disappeared up the mountain side.

## CHAPTER II.

That night Alan Giffard wrote a letter. It was a long one, and there was much in it that concerned only two people, the woman who read it and the man who wrote it, but toward the end he said:

"I think I have found a type for you up here, one that you might use quite effectively. She is too young and undeveloped yet to be beautiful, but her glorious

color and fine eyes make her even now suspiciously near to it. I think she will work up pretty well into one of your stories, and I shall make some studies of her so as to be able to illustrate for you *au naturel*. I shall do my best in the way of collecting material and storing away local color to take back to you. In the meantime, the girl's name is Loanne: will that do for a heroine? That reminds me, I must keep my eyes open for a hero; but the men seem to be an uninteresting lot."

True to his promise Giffard began the very next day to make sketches of the girl. He found her a very willing model, and she posed well, being full of the unconscious, lazy naturalness of youth. One day, in the midst of the posing, Dave's long lank figure appeared in the doorway of the little cabin, and without changing her position, Loanne flashed a look of defiance at the big fellow, which in no way disconcerted him, however, for he only sat down complacently where he could watch Giffard's brush-strokes.

"It's purty, sho', that air pictcher yer makin', Mister," he said, after a little. "An' I's thinkin', Loanne, I air minded ter get him ter take a po'trait uv yer fur me ter hang up down thar in the little cabin. It'll kinder he'p me out ter wait fur yer, mebbe."

"Yer see how it air with we'uns, Mister," he said, turning to Giffard. "Loanne have promised me, an' us air only waitin', an' whilst I air bidin' by myse'f, a po'trait 'ud be a heap er comp'ny, an' I aimed ter ast yer how much yer'd charge ter take one fur me."

"Perhaps she will let me present her with one of my sketches as a wedding gift," answered Giffard.



"Portraits are rather expensive things: I sometimes get hundreds of dollars for one of them."

"Then they air fools as buys 'em, I say," said Dave in amazement.

"An' you air a fool yerse'f, I say, Dave Byce," Loanne said, and she got up and went out of the house thro' the back door. For a moment Dave sat stupidly staring after her before he followed her out into the little orchard.

That night Giffard wrote: "The hero has appeared: a great hulking fellow who will probably continue in common-place docility for the rest of his days, but who might be worked up into tragic proportions."

When Dave followed Loanne from the house, he found her leaning against the old tumbled down fence overlooking the valley. She turned upon him scornfully as he came up.

"You air a purty 'un, ain't ye, ter be tellin' the likes uv him in thar that his pichters warn't wuth buyin'. You air a purty 'un, ain't yer now?"

"I air one as ain't afeard to speak my min' ter no man," Dave answered; "an' who air he, anyhow, ter come pesterin' 'roun' we'uns with his pichters an' slick tongue? Tell me that—"

But the girl interrupted him: "An' I air one as ain't afeard ter speak my min' nuther, an' I tell yer, Dave Byce, I air sick an' tired uv yer ugly face an' yer low-life ways. I air sick an' tired uv hearin' 'bout the cabin down the cove. I air sick an' tired uv ever'thing, do yer hear? An' I take back the word that I give yer. Do yer hear? I air sick an' tired uv you."



Dave looked at her for a moment, as she stood, shaken and flushed with passion, and then, without speaking, he turned and went off down the trail, the words rankling in his bosom.

### CHAPTER III.

When Giffard looked out of his window in the early morning of his last day at Monteagle, the beauty of the mountain mist that hid the house tops and the white tents and dipped down between the tree-bolls, enveloping all in its soft blue haze, seemed somehow to ensnare him, too. He had so wanted just such a day, and, during all the two weeks of his vacation, there had been nothing but absolutely heated skies, when the sunlight had seemed to scintillate upon the rocky roadside and the green, green trees. The subtle, undeveloped beauty that he sometimes fancied he found in Loanne had made him wish to paint her in just such misty light as the mountains were to-day, and tho' everything was all packed for travelling, he could not resist the temptation to get out his colors and try to get a quick effect for future working.

He stole downstairs softly, for the cottagers were not yet awake. Throughout the grounds he met no one; all was quiet and still. Even the gatekeeper was not at his lodge, and Giffard had to climb the fence to get out. The mist was so beautiful and so illusive that he had a nervous kind of feeling that the

whole thing would lift and float away before he could reach the little cabin down the mountain-side, and it was with a feeling of intense delight, as he came up under a ledge by the spring, that he saw Loanne herself coming down the slope thro' the laurel. The mist was in her hair and clung to her dress, clothing her in beauty. The effect was just what he wanted, and he called to her to stand.

The girl seemed in no way to be startled by seeing him. He had told her he was going away, and now he seemed only to be coming back again out of the haze of her thoughts. She stood still when he called, but her heart was sounding into her very ears, and the blood was dancing in her veins. She dared not speak; her happiness filled her and she feared it, too, would melt in the mist.

Oblivious to everything save the burning fire of his own artistic purpose, Giffard set to work with a will, and was soon laying on the color in broad, vigorous dashes. The thing pleased him, and he was thinking of one to whom he would show it, one who would like it even better than he.

The snapping of a dry twig sounded in the stillness down the ravine. The girl gave a little start, and let fall the hand that held the parted laurels.

"Likely it war a catamount," she said in a moment, a little ashamed of her nervousness. "They air noneesech good comp'ny, nuther."

She grasped the branch again and tried to resume her old position, but when Giffard turned to his canvas, he frowned, and said in an absorbed impatient way: "Oh, she has lost the pose!"

He spoke scarce above a whisper, and might not have been heard twenty steps away, but Loanne's quick eyes caught the look and the meaning of his impatient gesture.

"Don't yer be mad with me," she said, pleadingly; "don't yer, fur God's sake. I'll do my best. I'll do anything you say; I'll do anything you want of me—anything, anything."

There behind the laurel, hidden in the mist, a pair of quick ears caught the sound of the girl's voice, and a pair of sharp eyes peered all unobserved thro' the branches.

Giffard did not answer; indeed, he scarce heard the words, so intent was he upon his work, and the mist was wasting; he would have to go up and pose her. Springing up the slope, his palette and brushes still in his left hand, he put his right arm about the girl's shoulders, moving her head back into the old position. With his arm still around her, his hand steadying her head, he drew himself well back from her to see the effect, and with absorbed earnestness he exclaimed: "Beautiful!"

To him, the word, the position meant nothing irrelevant to his picture, and he did not feel the tremor that ran thro' the girl at his touch. Her face was very close to his, but he did not see a strange light that came into the wide-open startled eyes, nor hear the breath come short and quick. His thoughts were elsewhere, and, letting fall his arm, he turned and went down the slope to his work.

But the sharp eyes behind the laurel had seen all, and more. Since the day at the cabin, when Dave

had gone away after Loanne's passionate renunciation of him, the seeds of jealous rage which her words had sown had rankled in his heart, and now when he came thus suddenly upon her and Giffard alone in the mist the smouldering fire burst into flame. To him, Giffard's enfolding arm meant an embrace, and he cursed himself for a fool that he had left his gun at home. It would have filled his heart with joy to send a bullet into Giffard's and lay him dead at Loanne's feet. Perhaps it would not be too late yet, he thought, as he slipped back thro' the laurel, and this time not a twig snapped beneath his stealthy tread.

By the time the sifting sunlight had stolen away the mist, the sketch was finished, and Giffard's good humor had returned.

"Come down and see it," he said, calling up to the girl, and beginning at once to wipe his brushes and clean his bedaubed palette.

Loanne came down the path slowly; her strength was spent with the long standing, and she felt still fluttering and tremulous.

"I shall take away many things to remind me of the mountains," Giffard said with cheerful indifference, "and I want you to let me leave you a little remembrance." He ran his hand into his pocket and held out a five-dollar gold piece.

"I don't want yer money," she said.

"It is only to remember me by," he answered, pleasantly.

She snatched the gold piece from him with sudden purpose, clasping it hard in both her hands.

"Oh, don't yer go 'way an' leave me," she cried, and her voice was hoarse with passion. "Don't yer leave me; don't yer leave me! Only jes' take me er-long with yer. I won't pester yer; I'll do anything you say, but don't yer leave me; don't yer leave me!"

The girl's words struck him as a blow; long afterwards the memory of them came back to him with painful echo.

But now, when her passionate outburst was over, the girl sank down upon the stones at his feet, covering her face with her hands. Bending over her he put his hand upon her head and said gently:

"There is no place for you, child, in the world where I am going. It is better for you here. By and by it will all come right."

His soberness quieted her. She lay in a heap on the stones, sobbing, but making no effort to speak, even when he left her and climbed up the slope betwixt the odorous laurel.

## CHAPTER IV.

It must have been scarcely ten minutes later that, stealing noiselessly through the underbrush, Dave found Loanne alone upon the stones just as Giffard had left her.

Bending over her, he caught her by the arm and shook her roughly.

"Whar's he gone?" he demanded.

She looked up at him with wide, startled eyes. For full a moment she was too dazed to think or speak. Then, like a flash, it all came upon her. The breaking of the twig over there in the laurel, the anger now in Dave's queer keen eyes, the menace in his manner, the gun in his hand—she comprehended all, and, at any price, she would save the life of the man she loved.

"Oh, Dave," she said, as with sudden joyousness, springing up and throwing her arms about his neck, "whar have yer been ter all this long time? I war up ter the big road time an' time erg'in to see ef yer'd pass thater way? an' Lor', Dave, I got right down foolish stud'in' 'bout yer takin' me at my word that day down ter the cabin. Yer oughter knowed me better, Dave, yer oughter knowed me better."

Was it the mist that had beclouded poor Dave's wits? It seemed that he could in no way comprehend what Loanne had said, but her arms were around his neck and her lips were very close to his. With a murmur of bursting happiness, he folded the girl to his heart.

"Loanne, honey," he said, after a while as they sat upon the stones? "I war er fool, I war. I thought yer meant them words yer give that day at the cabin; I war er fool all erlong, an' ef I'd er found him here whenst I come back with the gun, I'd er kilt him, I would."

Even as he spoke the whistle of a locomotive sounded from above.

"What war that, Dave?" asked Loanne breathlessly.

"It air the morning train leavin' Monteagle," he said, and she knew that her purpose was wrought, that Giffard was safe.

During the few days that followed, before Dave and Loanne stood in the little front room at Squire Miller's, and were made man and wife, the girl seemed like one daft. She sat looking on, quiet and listless, while the old woman made a few hasty preparations for the wedding; but sometimes a strange fire shone in her large dark eyes when she turned them toward the westward as the sun sank.

There had been one or two sketches, wet or unfinished, left by Giffard at the little cabin. These, and an old slouch hat which he had used to shade his eyes, and a paint-stained silk handkerchief, Loanne took the day before her wedding and went with them down the mountain-side.

"She air goin' ter fling 'em inter the Rift," her mother said to herself, looking sadly after her as she left the cabin.

Dave was a little alarmed when the sad-eyed, white-faced bride who followed him home grew daily sadder and paler. He fancied his own presence wearied her, and left her more and more to herself in the little cabin where he had meant they should be so happy together.

"She ain't use'n to me yit," he said. "I'll give her time."

One evening, as he wandered about the mountain, thinking of his wife, and feeling more than usually desolate and lone, he heard, suddenly, the sound of a



woman's voice. It was in a wild, much broken part of the mountains; there were cuts and rifts and deep gorges hiding underneath the brush, and down the slope was a cave, usually weird and dark, but from this there seemed to come now a faint flickering light. Crawling close to the cliff's edge, Dave lay flat down, peering over, with his rifle in his hand. The light in the cave came from a small bit of candle that flared and sputtered in a bottle's mouth, and it showed on the rough walls a few half-finished sketches, a silk handkerchief pinned up banner-wise, and an old slouch hat. Dave saw and knew them all, and in their midst, kneeling upon the floor of the cave, was Loanne. Up there above on the cliff's edge where he lay concealed, Dave could hear her deep sobbing. For full a moment he only gazed at her, scarce moving a muscle. Then—there was a flash of fire, and a rifle ball sped through the space below, throwing the girl upon her face.

When they found her the next morning, the white tallow of the wasted candle had run down across the pool of blood that crept between her dead lips.

The little cabin down the mountain-side still stands, empty and desolate now, but the gum-hopper under the chestnut has tumbled to the ground long ago, ashless and rotten, and, around the little bench at the spring among the laurel, there lingers only a haunting echo of the dreary beating of dripping clothes.

On the other side of the ridge, sometimes women at their milking in the late eventide, or men tending

cattle in the deep gorges, are startled by the apparition of the "White Stag," and in pursuit of him a strange, fierce-eyed man with long, unkempt, straw-colored hair. They call him "The Wild Huntsman of Sequatchie Valley," and the mountains tell no tales.







"She saw coming in to her a young girl with a big bunch of roses in her hand."—Page 174.

MISS PIM'S PARTY.

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NOBODY ever knew how it came about that she gave a party, and least of all Miss Pim herself. It just popped into her head, she said, and she did it.

Perhaps it was the quantity of oysters that Miss Pim saw every afternoon as she returned home, and the big piles of empty shells which Pasquale himself would be heaping up on the sidewalk next morning as she went back to her work, that first made her think of an oyster supper. Perhaps it was the glowing accounts of balls and parties and receptions and "five-o'clocks" and high teas that she read about in the stale papers, which her friend "Gloves" sometimes gave her as she passed through the salesroom on her way to the fourth-story, for Miss Pim was a cutter in the ready-made department of Great & Co. Now Miss Pim was fond of saying that she had chosen work of this kind because her tastes ran that way. In the little village up country where had been her home, she had, she declared, excellent advantages in art, and once thought of making it her profession, "but," and Miss Pim's eyes were seldom

dry when she spoke of it, "dear papa had died, and there had been mamma to think of," and so she had just come down to the city and taken work as a cutter because it was in her line, as it were, since she had such an eye for form. Mamma was dead now, and there was only Miss Pim's self for her to think about, but still newspapers were a little beyond her. "Gloves" confided to her that she herself had them from a "feller" who was a typesetter, and who sometimes came to walk home with her nights.

But, however it came about, Miss Pim was fully determined to have an oyster supper in honor of the anniversary of her own birthday. "In all the born days of her life," she said she had never tasted oysters, and with deliberate avoidance of the important question as to what length of time was measured thereby, would simply add that "she couldn't do it any younger." So that part of the matter was settled; she would have an oyster supper. It was so very fortunate, she declared, that her birthday came in November, a month with the talismanic "r" in it; really it seemed to be intended that she should have an oyster supper.

Miss Pim began to think of it and plan for it weeks before it came off. At first she was in a state of great perturbation to know what to have besides oysters. They were such an unknown quantity to her that she found it difficult to work up a repast with them at the focal point. Perhaps after this she wouldn't like them, they did look so "messy" when Mr. Pasquale took them out of their shells, but try them she must and would. Miss Pim felt it over her like

a covering that she would rather have died than confess to "Gloves" her ignorance in regard to the bivalves, but, nevertheless, determined, since nothing else offered, to obtain from her quondam friend all the second-hand information she could without degradation to herself. She sacrificed her morning nap upon the altar of her desire for knowledge, and spent all her spare moments at the glove counter listening to her friend's accounts of the "entertainments" which she seemed to be in a chronic state of attending. But somehow these conversations always left Miss Pim with only a vague conglomerated idea of "fellers" and "Wooster" and "oysters," all of which, and especially the latter pronunciation, convinced Miss Pim that "Gloves" had been a "girl" before she became a "saleslady." This settled Miss Pim's mind on the subject of inviting "Gloves" to her supper. She was well enough in her way to be sure, and very nice indeed at the store, but—and Miss Pim asked herself the question more than once—"would she be an agreeable social acquaintance?"

In fact, the question of guests became a very important one. Whom to invite Miss Pim knew not. To be sure the cobbler down stairs spoke to her every morning as she passed, but frequently he had patched her well-worn shoes, so of course he was out of the question. The little milliner on the first floor, with whom she had what she called some "social acquaintance," had once given a tea to which Miss Pim was not invited, so that left her out. The Simpkins, Mr. and Mrs., agent and saleslady, were not to be considered, since they were, as Miss Pim expressed it,



"utterly devoid of sentiment." Some other time she would invite them, but to this, her first oyster supper, her guests must be from the social world—the chosen "400" itself.

It is true Miss Pim's was only a newspaper acquaintance with "the set," but that would serve her purpose, perhaps, as well as any. Long before the event was to take place, she conned the social columns of her stock-in-hand of newspapers, making selection of the guests she would invite. After much cogitation she decided to have four couples and one "odd gentleman." "The ten of us will make such a nice-sized party," she said. Though Miss Pim's hair was turned quite grey, and steel-rimmed spectacles held down the loose curls of it that clustered about her ears, her heart began to give a little flutter when she began to scan the papers for the name of the "odd gentleman" whom she would invite to her supper.

You will see from all this that Miss Pim was in the highest degree romantic, but, singularly enough, she determined that she would have a good, strong, sensible-sounding name for her "odd gentleman," and this she hit upon to her satisfaction in Adam Croft. It made no difference to her that the papers from which she selected were out of date, she saw this name recurring so frequently, and the owner of it seemed to be so popular, that she felt perfectly satisfied that her choice was a wise one.

As to ladies, the first one Miss Pim hit upon to invite was a certain Miss Alexia Brain, who, it would appear, went everywhere. Now, once upon a time, Miss Pim herself had two names, and that one which

she had lost along with her father and mother and the friends of her village childhood was none other than Alexia, and that is why Miss Brain, her namesake, came to be the heroine of all her romances about the "upper ten," as Adam Croft was the hero, and why those two were to be the first invited. The other guests she selected in a haphazard kind of way, settling upon a D, an E, an F and a G, an H, an I and a J.

But how were they to be invited? Miss Pim's first idea was to write a card to each one and then stuff the whole batch of invitations up the chimney, as she had used to do letters to Santa Claus long ago. But somehow that seemed too much make believe, and she finally determined to spend nine of her hoard of pennies for stamps, and mail the cards, addressed to the "city" at large which was as much as Miss Pim knew of the whereabouts of the guests she was inviting. This gave much more tangibility to the thing and pleased her beyond measure.

Upon the cards she intended for Alexia Brain and Adam Croft she spent particular pains. On the former she wrote simply in her little, neat, stiff hand: "At home. Miss Pim. November 21st. Room 17, No. 413 Blank street," and around the margin she scattered pen drawings of oysters on the half shell. She had hit upon this as being an excellent way of announcing "the style of entertainment;" but the card which Adam was to receive she felt must be more ornate still, since he was to be the "odd gentleman;" so, instead of pen drawings, she painted forget-me-nots and bow-knots all around in water-color,

and did the writing in gilt with a very fine brush. It was very "pritty," as Miss Pim called it, and the next morning as she went down stairs carrying her dainty packet of nine cards, all duly signed, sealed and addressed, her heart beat very fast, and she had a vague fear that she would trip and scatter her precious invitations over the dusty steps.

To make the descent more difficult, the new young man was just coming up, and Miss Pim was in such a state of perturbation that she could scarcely return the bow he gave her, but which she afterwards, however, stoutly declared was a remarkably gallant one. Now, the new young man was a tall, broad-shouldered, good-looking fellow, who had rented the little room at the end of the hall from Miss Pim's, and who kept a light burning in his room half the night. Miss Pim's kindly heart misgave her that she could not invite this young man to her party. Though he wore a rough great-coat and only a simple wide-awake atop of his crisping waves of hair, Miss Pim fancied she detected the prince-in-disguise air about him, and was quite sure, from a look which she sometimes saw in his handsome grey eyes, that he was in trouble, and she longed to comfort him. She was, moreover, certain that he ate oysters, for she had frequently seen him carrying a little paper box of them to his room. But—and her heart sank—she could not invite him; she did not even know his name, and besides it would not be proper, since he would be the only one who could really come.

Upon the morning of the twenty-first Miss Pim rose early. Every crack and cranny of her little

room was swept and garnished. She got out the time-honored white spread that she had known on the company bed at home, and the embroidered pillow-slips, which showed the work of her own dainty girlhood's fingers. She set the table, putting thereon the much-darned cloth of snowy damask, which was still sweet with ancient odor of cedar and lavender. Though her stock of table-ware was exhausted in laying three covers, she kept saying to herself in childish make-believe: "Maybe they won't all come." There was the plate with the wreath of little tight pink roses all around, and the cup and saucer to match; these she would put at "Alexia's place," she said, and the ones with garlands and bow-knots must be left for "the odd gentleman." She herself would use the little set so gay with immodest shepherdesses in short frocks, and who sat so very close to the wry-faced shepherds that Miss Pim fervently hoped none of her guests would observe them.

She kept thinking of it all down at the store, and wondering if she had left anything undone. It seemed to her the day would never end, but when the hour for closing came her heart was as light as a feather. There was quite a little spring in her step when she left the elevator, and she was just on the point of inviting "Gloves" out of hand and taking her off in triumph to her supper. But "Gloves" greeting to her was to announce that she was going to the theatre with her "feller," so that settled it.

Mr. Pasquale was very gracious when she stopped to make her purchase of the precious oysters, and himself added two for "lagniappe," he said. He

selected the whitest and crispest stalks of celery, wrapping them up carefully so as not to break the tops, and was satisfied to weigh only in his soiled but doubtless generous fingers the half pound of crackers that completed her order.

The little cobbler was just closing up for the night, when Miss Pim passed.

"Seasonable weather," he said, pleasantly, and Miss Pim knew from his manner there was more to follow.

"Was a lady down here enquirin' for you this mornin'," he went on. "See anything of her? A youngish lady an' pretty. I see that th'rough her veil."

"A young lady enquiring for me?" said Miss Pim, blankly.

"Why, you see," responded the cobbler, warming to his subject under Miss Pim's mystification, "first thing I know a carriage drove up, an' the young lady was gettin' out. Time I see her I know she's that girl with so much money she couldn't use it all herself, and so she have jest taken to lookin' roun' to fin' somebody as 'ill spen' it for her. 'Slummin',' you know, they calls it, an' I see this girl over an' often passin' here on her errans, but I couldn't noways make out why she's stoppin'. Well, howsomever, she did stop, an' I see she helt a card in her han', an' she looked first at it, then at the number on the door there, an' then at me agin, an' then she asked quite pleasant-like: 'Can you tell me, please, if Miss Pim lives upstairs?' 'She does, Ma'am,' says I, an' then afore I know it she's there in the shop, the young

lady was, askin' me all about you. 'Do you know her?' says she. 'I do, Ma'am,' says I, 'seein' her pass ever day these five years, an' patchin' for her off an' on, an', if I do say it, a pleasanter lady I never see.' " Miss Pim blushed quite prettily at this well-rounded compliment, but the cobbler went on. " An' so, bein' asked, I up an' told her all about you, Miss, an' likewise I put the question to the young lady, if there was any message she would wish delivered, seein's I was here constant. But she said there warn't none, an' she thanked me for bein' so kin', an' then she lef' as suddint as she come, drivin' off in her carriage."

He waited for Miss Pim to speak, but she was too busy with her thoughts.

"You don't know the young lady yourself, Ma'am?" he asked.

"Oh, no, and I have no idea what she could have wanted." The little lady spoke quite truly, but she tripped upstairs with her head as full of fancies as her arms were full of bundles.

Everything in the little room was just as she had left it. A bright fire was soon burning in the grate, and Miss Pim went around the table carefully blowing upon ever vacant spot of cloth, to make sure that no semblance of cinders or dust should cling to the snowy linen. She polished the little array of cups and saucers till they shone again, and put the crisp stalks of celery on a stand in the midst of all. The rest of the work was not so easy. She pressed her lips close together, and there was just the least bit of an upward tilt to her nose as she dumped the oysters



out into the little bowl. She stuffed the soaking paper box in the fire and set the bowl gingerly on the table.

"The things do look so s-s-slippery," she was saying aloud to herself, when a rap at the door startled her almost into turning the little bowl quite over on the cloth.

Though Miss Pim never confessed even afterwards what she had expected, when she held the door open and saw coming in to her a young girl with a big bunch of roses in her hands, she declares in telling of it all now:

"I felt I should faint."

What she actually did, however, was to stand stock still and let the girl with the beautiful eyes, and beautiful mouth and beautiful hair go quite up to her and say very sweetly:

"I am Alexia Brain, Miss Pim, and I thank you so much for letting me come to you to-night. I brought these roses thinking you might like them for your table."

Now, never in Miss Pim's born days had she seen so many and such beautiful roses, and when she had longed for them she felt that only in heaven would her wish be gratified, and so what did she do but just take the precious flowers in her arms and drop down into the little chair, and cry for very joy and wonderment, to her lifelong regret never saying a word of welcome to her guest. To this day she cannot tell how it came about that Alexia Brain just laid her furs upon the little bed, and sat down beside her in the warm firelight, putting around her a pair of strong,



young arms, and resting her head upon a firm, young shoulder till the flood of tears was spent.

She never knew either how it happened that she soon came to be telling Alexia all the story of her poor life—it needed but a few words for this—and about her party and her invitations.

“And Alexia,” Miss Pim would declare afterwards, “just sat there on my old hair-bottomed chair as natural as if she had never been anywhere else in her life, till I fairly blinked to see if I was dreaming.”

But she knew that she was not dreaming when she heard firm footsteps resounding in the hallway and there came a moment later a knock upon her door, but, nevertheless, she opened it tremblingly, to find standing upon the threshold, without his great-coat and wide awake, but still broad-shouldered and handsome—the “new young man.” But there was a light in his eyes that made her forget their sadness, for they looked quite over Miss Pim’s head, and the girl beyond, in the glow of the firelight felt the warm blood mount to her cheek, as she said eagerly :

“Adam Croft !”

“Adam Croft ?” echoed Miss Pim, faintly. Would wonders never cease ?

“I am glad to meet you, Miss Pim. I have seen you frequently, and hope we shall be better neighbors.”

That is what the young man’s lips said, gallantly, but his eyes were still firewards, his heart was beating “Alexia, Alexia, Alexia,” and a moment later he held her hand in his. The girl looked up into his face, and then a strange thing happened. Adam Croft knew that a question he had been telling himself every day

and hour for the past year he could no longer hope to ask, had in that moment been asked and answered. And Alexia Brain knew that a question she had so longed to hear had in that moment been asked, and rejoiced that her heart had answered truly.

Is there any more to be told? Yes, still of Miss Pim's party, and surely there was never anything like it.

By and by Alexia put the roses into the little bowl which Miss Pim called the "old blue and white," but which she herself called a Crown Derby.

There was only a bit of white at the girl's throat, and she wore a simple blue wool dress, but her cheeks glowed and her eyes shone beneath the curling rings of her brown hair, and Adam Croft knew she had never been more beautiful. He watched her cut thin slices from the loaf which Miss Pim had hastily brought from the cupboard, dismayed at the meagre supply of crackers, and himself knelt beside her on the hearth to help with the toasting.

"A knowledge of cooking is what came to me as a compensation for that money I lost," he said.

"Yes, and a knowledge of something else, too," said the girl. "Do you think that during the year you have kept yourself away from your friends that none of them would be reading and recognizing the books you have written?"

"I hoped you would read them," he said, "and in that hope I dipped my pen."

Miss Pim's joy was supreme.

"I just sat there," she says, "and looked at the two beautiful things till I was fairly daft for joy at

their happiness. Indeed, I know I was quite daft, else I never could have eaten those horrid s-s-slippery things which Alexia put upon my plate."

Times have changed for Miss Pim since that night, however, if she has never learned to eat oysters, and times have changed for Alexia Brain and Adam Croft.

"I should never have had the courage to speak if you had not come to Miss Pim's party, Alex, dear," he always says; and she answers confidently, "Then I should have died, Adam, dear."

And Miss Pim at least believes it.



## A BREAK IN THE LEVEE.

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### CHAPTER I.

Clang! clang! clang! rang the big plantation bell, and Jeff started up, springing out of bed before he was quite awake.

Lights flitted back and forth in the yard below, lanterns waved and flickered high up on the embankment at the river's edge, and beneath the clang of the bell came the confused shouts of many voices, and in all and through all the ominous roar of rushing water.

"O, God, the levee!" cried the boy, staring out into the night.

Suddenly the lights all came together, one voice shouted high above the rest, then the sound of fleeing hoof-beats, the clank of the mule's chains, the rattle of scrapes, and darkness! Darkness and silence, and then the sickening splash of caving banks and the inrush of maddened waters!

As Jeff slipped into his clothes he heard the lap of the water when it reached the house, and by and

by saw the light stream through the window below, gleaming far out across the flooded fields.

"Are you awake, Jeff?" asked his mother, coming in softly, shading the candle with her hand. "Ah! You know, then. The break was just in front there, by the big cottonwood tree."

"By the big cottonwood?" Jeff repeated, breathlessly. "My God, mother, not there, not there!"

"What is it, lad?" she asked, gently, putting the candle on the table and taking his hand in hers. "What is it, Jeff, dear?" she repeated when he did not answer.

"O, mother," he cried, tearing his hand from hers and covering his face. "How can I tell you, even you? Do you remember last Wednesday?—my birthday, you know," he went on, speaking rapidly and clutching his mother's hand again, helplessly. "As I started off to go hunting that morning, riding down the river road there just below the cut-off I met Colonel Cheatham. He stopped and came back with me to show me a weak place in the levee just there by the old cottonwood in front, and he said I must be sure and tell father, and O, mother, what shall I do? I forgot, I forgot!"

"O, my poor, thoughtless lad!" said his mother, soothingly.

"You'll tell father for me, won't you, mother?" the boy cried.

"I think I'd better not, dear," answered his mother, but there were tears in her eyes. "This is your first great trial and you must face it like a man."

There were tears in the boy's eyes, too, but "I'll do it mother, so help me," he said, firmly, and turned at once to leave the room.

"Mother!" he cried, suddenly, coming back and flinging his arms about her.

"God help you, my child," she said, kissing him, and he was gone."

Jeff scarce recognized his father in the bowed and broken man he found in the chamber below. Every lap of the water without was like a sword-thrust into the boy's heart, but he made his confession quite bravely. His father listened, seeming scarce to understand, but when it was over he said, in a voice Jeff never had heard before :

"You forgot, and I may be a ruined man. You had better go now, I think, until I, too, forget."

The words, the tone, smote the boy like a blow, stunning him. He set his lips firmly together and left the room.

"Go, until I, too, forget." He heard his father's words over and over again in the sound of his own foot-fall on the bare floor. The hall door stood open and the swinging lamp within sent its gleam far over the waste of water. Above the submerged steps a little row of boats rose and fell on the lapping waves, tethered to the posts of the veranda. Jeff soon found his own little green skiff moored among the rest, and it needed but a moment to reach his hat and coat from the spreading antlers behind the door.

He heard the sound of his mother's foot-fall in the hall as the oars cut the water, but above that, above the beating of his heart and the rush of the

waves, he heard his father's words, and a moment later his skiff skimmed out of the lantern's gleam and the darkness swallowed him up.

## CHAPTER II.

At Saunders' big Texas ranch in the early morn of that scorching October day, all was bustle and stir and commotion. On all the parching prairies not a blade of grass was left for the hungry herd; tanks were empty, streams were dry and the men were making ready to drive the cattle out of the land of drought to the flush waters and green pastures of the Indian Territory.

In the dusty yard around the cabin, spurs rattled, saddles creaked, ponies neighed, men shouted and hallooed, and beyond in the great corrals, the cattle bleated and bellowed with their thousands of thirsty throats.

"You'll have to go an' he'p Mason git up a bunch of cattle in the north pasture, Little Partner," said Saunders to a boy who stood near the cabin door fastening his spur-strap, with his arm through his pony's bridle.

"All right, sir," said the boy, springing into the saddle.

"Tell Mason to fetch a thousan' an' fifty-two head, an' meet us at the river to-morrow night, or—bust. We wanter start fur the Nation in the mornin'. A



thousan' an' fifty-two head, don't furgit now, an' ride like hell."

"I shall not forget," said the boy firmly, but a shadow crossed over his face as he spoke, a shadow that did not leave it as he galloped off over the prairie.

The sun streamed down, blistering his back through his flannel shirt, and the fiery alkali dust burned into every pore of his body. The dry grass crinkled and crisped under his horse's hoofs, and as far as the eye could reach was only the scorching waste of brown prairie land. Even the empty sky above glowed with a white heat, and through the telescopic atmosphere the mountains far to the northward cut against it keen as a knife blade. Heat and dust were everywhere, with now and then the gleam of a white shaly river-bed, dry and glistening like a silver thread winding across the brown prairies, which the dead and dying cattle had turned into vast charnel houses, where the buzzards held full sway.

By daybreak the next morning the cattle in the north pasture were bunched and ready for driving.

"You'd better lead with me, litlle 'un," Mason said kindly, when the boy galloped up for orders before the march began. "There'll be less ridin' in front," the man added to himself, as the boy swung through the gate, "an' the chap is sore to the touch now, I can tell by the way he sets his saddle."

Mason had watched the boy narrowly, with his kind womanly brown eyes, ever since the day of his coming to the ranch, and he knew, no one better, how the lad's bones ached from the constant fatigue which

the short snatches of rest were not long enough to remove; he knew how his temples throbbed when the hot dry air almost boiled the blood in his veins, and stifled his nostrils.

"The young 'un's got grit," he told Saunders in his lazy way after the boy's first round-up, and he kept his eye upon him.

"We must make the river to-night or bust," Mason yelled, as the herd swept out of the pen.

The men answered with a shout, and the boy galloping along at the head of the mighty procession felt like a warrior going into battle, and heard Mason's musical halloo as a clarion cry. Behind came the heavy tramp of hoof-beats, the bellow of thirsty throats, the crack of whips and the shouts of the men.

The sun was almost down when the distant smirch of trees against the horizon showed where the river lay. Mason's horse had gone lame toward the middle of the afternoon, and now jogged along stiff and painful but a short distance ahead of the herd.

"Poor nag, maybe I can spell you a bit," he said, preparing to dismount.

As he slipped his foot from the stirrup a noise in the rear startled him; and he cast a quick eye over his shoulder for a moment.

"My God, the cows have smelt water!" he said breathlessly. "Fly fur your life, little 'un," he went on, almost gently, as he rose in his saddle and leaned forward. "Bear to the northward," he cried. "Now ride like the devil, and God he'p you."

The boy's hand tugged at the bridle and he felt the pony bound forward, stung by a blow from Mason's quirt. Another moment and he would be safe.

But Mason? In one quick backward look the boy saw his spent pony rear on his lame legs, and give one wild leap forward: he heard a heavy thud as they went down, and man and horse were lying in a heap together on the dry grass in the path of the stampeding herd.

"O God! O mother!" cried the boy, and his voice was a prayer. The pony wheeled in his tracks, and bore him back in the face of the oncoming death.

There was one moment of breathless, eager energy while he slipped the loose end of his riata under Mason's helpless arms, and wound it round the limp body; another, and he was in the stirrup again, with the lariat's loop held hard and fast on the saddle's horn. He felt his spurs cut deep in the pony's hips as the poor beast sprang forward, he felt the tugging of Mason's impotent body as it dragged behind; he heard the swell and surge of mad voices as the infuriated beasts swept on in the dust cloud, he felt their hot breath in his face, and heard the wild neigh of his pony when the hoofs struck him; then a fierce, sharp pain, and all was over.

## CHAPTER III.

“Mother.”

The boy opened his eyes for a moment, but the whitewashed hospital walls, the narrow cot and Saunders bending over confused him. The eyelids quivered and closed.

Slowly it came all back to him; the long ride, the hot sun, the dust and the stampeding cattle.

“Where is Mason?” he asked by and by, looking up again into Saunders’ kind blue eyes.

“He’s all right now, poor old chap,” said Saunders gently, and there was more in the tone than in the words, but the boy understood.

He lay quietly for a long while, with the bed-clothes pulled over his eyes, and the sheet was wet when he looked out from under it again.

“Mason was kinder to me than anybody in the world had ever been—except my mother,” he said by and by. “I wish I had been the one to go,” he added, wearily.

“Don’t you say that, lad, don’t you now,” Saunders said, stroking the boy’s hand with his own brown palm. “It’ll all come right.”

“But you don’t know, Saunders, you don’t know,” and the boy turned his head over on the pillow wearily.

“Maybe I do, mo’n you think fur,” Saunders went on soothingly. “You’ve been lyin’ here prit nigh two months now, you know, and durin’ that time I’ve been here off an’ on sorter constant, an’

you've said things as maybe you wouldn't 'a' said to me confidentially like ef you'd been at yourse'f, but I reckon there ain't no harm done. I was only waitin' tell you got strong enough to travel to ast you ef you wanted to go home."

"O, no; I can't, Saunders, I can't," the boy cried.

"You mean 'bout the levee, don't you?" Saunders asked gently. "You see, you've 'tol mos' ever'thing, and I jest pieced out the rest, little chap, 'an blamed ef I ain't felt mighty sorry fur you. That's straight now, an' no mistake, but the mo' I study erbout it the mo' it seem to me there was a kind of a hitch somewhur. Don't you misonderstan' me now, little 'un. I ain't never had no call to preach; I ain't even been a good man, but somehow, when a feller's spent the best part er his life a-ridin' over these here ol' pararas where there don't seem to be notin' but jest God an' the universe, he natchelly has time to do a deal er thinkin'. An' anyhow seems the Lord puts diffunt thoughts in a head after it begins to turn grey to what He did when it was young. Now, little chap, maybe so I'm wrong, but it seems to me that the bigges' forgettin' you done warn't erbout that break in the levee. I know it looked mighty big to you that night when the overflow come, and you knowed a word f'um you 'an a few san' bags maybe could 'a' 'kep it out, but what I aim to say is your furgettin' didn't stop there. I own there ain't many a boy as wouldn't 'a' done jest erbout what you did that night when you lef' home. I 'speat I would 'a' done the same thing myse'f twenty years ago, and maybe so I'd 'a' felt jest as proud an' jest as hurt an'

jest as brave as you did. You thought erbout all them that night, didn't you, little partner, an' how you'd do somethin' great to make up fur furgettin,' didn't you? I bet you did, an' you thought erbout yourse'f an' you thought erbout your father, too, some, maybe, not jest as you would ef you'd 'a' waited tell nex' day or nex' week, but wasn't there somebody you furgot? Somebody, too, as was wuth the whole worl' to you, somebody as would 'a' gone down into her grave to 'a' saved you, somebody as waited an' watched after the waters went down, an' is waitin' an' watchin' yet, please God, when ever'boday else has given you up. Ain't I right erbout it, little man?"

"O, Saunders, O, Saunders," said the boy, taking his friend's hand while the tears streamed down and wet the pillow, "what shall I do?"

"There ain't no trouble 'bout answerin' that question now," Saunders said, "hard as it is to go back of our wrong-doing an' make things straight, but mothers is mothers wherever you put 'em, an' maybe so I'd a been diffunt ef mine had been left to me longer. But your way is clear enough, an' it ain't sech a powerful long journey f'um Texas to Louisiana"

"Do you mean it, Saunders?" said the boy, with a smile on his wan lips; "and can I go to-day?"

"No, but it won't be very long befo'e you start ef you keep on like this," Saunders answered, "an' somehow, ol' chap, you've made it mighty easy fur me to tell you somethin' I've jest been bustin' to tell you ever sence you've been lyin' here," and Saunders cleared his throat while the boy looked up at him eagerly.

"You see," he went on slowly, "Mason warn't quite gone when the boys picked him up, tho' he was done fur befo'e you got to him, lad; the pony had fell acrost him, an' he'd jest breath enough left to tell me all erbout it. Po' ol' Mason! They was a smile in them big dyin' woman eyes er his when he looked up at me an' said: 'Didn't I tell you the little chap had grit?' An' then he tol' me somethin' else, poor ol' partner. He tol' me he didn't have nobody in the worl' but jest hisse'f, but you could 'a' knowed that by the loneliness in his eyes, an' he said to let his sheer er the cattle go to you. Seem's ef he kinder 'specioned things was pretty bad with you one way or 'nuther, an' he tol' me to let the cows go the first chance I got, an' turn the proceeds over to you. What do you say now to a little wad er ten thousan' dollars to start home with?"

"Poor old Mason," the boy said, and his eyes were brimming with tears as he sat up in bed. "I can make it up to father now, Saunders, can't I?"

Two weeks later, when the Valley Queen steamed through the drawbridge at Shreveport, Jeff stood on her upper deck, glad with the prospect of home near at hand. How dear and familiar everything looked! Behind were the broken red hill-slopes dotted with cottages, the slender church spires, the crouching, cavernous warehouses of the little city; beyond were the black plantation lowlands, the great sprawling, grass-grown levees, and the dark, treacherous river winding between, shrunken now within its muddy banks, waiting calm and quiescent for the swell of the spring rains to send it sweeping on in its work of



destruction. Men stood about in little squads on deck talking of hard times, the low price of cotton, and the calamitous levee system just in the old way, but the boy leaning against the railing looking out over the water heard their voices but dimly.

When the whistle blew and the boat rounded the curve Jeff saw with a little pang of bitterness the old cottonwood which marked his own home landing, but he sprang ashore joyously before the wavering stage-plank had touched the bank. He was not the only passenger for Steel Dust Plantation, he found, as the men who crowded after him pushed by, hurrying up to the house. Jeff followed eagerly. Was this the home-coming he had pictured so often as he rode over the dusty prairies, or lay on his hospital cot in those sweet days of convalescence?

Surely something was wrong. About the yard and the stable men were hurrying to and fro, while others were sampling cotton from the bursting bales under the big gin-house shed. Teamless wagons blockaded the broad avenue which led to the house, and, under the spreading oaks, mules were bunched or stood in long lines tethered to the lot fence. Barn doors were wide open, and plows and hoes and scrapes, in desolate heaps, littered the lawn.

Jeff saw it all in the brief interval which it took to reach the house, and the noisy chattering of the crowd in the hallway suddenly ceased, even the blatant yell of the auctioneer broke confusedly and his hammer fell to the floor with a bang as a bright

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young voice from the doorway shouted clear above the eager bobbing heads:

"I forbid this sale!"

Jeff elbowed his way to the crier's desk, unbuckling the leather belt from beneath his coat as he went.

"What is the amount of your attachment, sir?" he asked.

"Eight thousand seven hundred and fifty dollars, with costs," replied the astonished auctioneer.

"Then dismiss the crowd and count your money," Jeff said, pulling a roll of bills from his belt pocket.

And was that the end of the triumph? Is there no more to be told?

Some one was calling his name from the stairway, the crowd fell back for him to pass, and the boy bounded up the steps with a glad light in his eyes.

"Father, mother," he cried, and they folded him in their hearts. The victory was won, the breach was healed.









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